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HERR PAULUS

HIS RISE, HIS GREATNESS, AND HIS FALL

BY

WALTER BESANT

AUTHOR OF 'ALL SORTS AND CONDITIONS OF MEN' ETC.



IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

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THE SECOND VOLUME.

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HERR PAULUS.

BOOK THE SECOND—cont.

CHAPTER VI.

BEAUMONT STREET, MARYLEBONE.

IF you walk up that street, now well nigh forgotten by the fashionable world, called the Marylebone High-street, just after you pass the old Parish Church, and before you come to the stately new church of St. Marylebone, you will light upon a small row of little houses running eastward. A street called Beaumont-street begins here, but long before there was any Beaumont-street these houses were erected. They are two-storied houses, and painted drab, and always look as if they had been ‘done up’ last summer, and their shutters—they still have shutters—are green,

If you keep one eye upon the old Parish Church, and another upon these houses, they are quite in place, and harmonise perfectly. If you think of the great new church, and of the opposite houses, they are incongruous. The little old Parish Church is just exactly now as it was when Hogarth painted the service in it, save that they have cruelly removed the old three-decker—indeed, I know not where to look for a three-decker now, nearer than Whitby. There used to be one at Lyme Regis, but I hear that it has been removed. If you go to this church on a Sunday morning, and shut your eyes to the congregation, which, somehow, seems to consist chiefly of gentlemen's gentlemen, and of ladies' ladies, you may fancy yourself back in the days of wigs and commodes, of purple satin coats and hoops. Moreover, if you contemplate this little row of houses steadily, you are presently enabled to remove all the houses and streets opposite to them, and to restore in their place the dear old Marylebone Gardens, beloved of Pepys, frequented by

Captain Macheath, by the roystering blades of London Town, by the sparks from the Temple and Gray's Inn, by grave citizens who brought their wives and daughters for an evening of innocent amusement, and by riotous young noblemen who came with Cynthia and Chloe. At the back of the church was the workhouse, whither, in due course, Cynthia and Chloe retreated, a good deal battered by the Joyous Life ; and south of the workhouse lay the great burying ground, oldest of the London cemeteries, which is now a garden. Cynthia and Chloe both lie buried here without any tombstones. Oh ! the tales that these houses could tell—the nights they remember when the horns resounded in the gardens, and when the men sang at their suppers, and Kitty, and Jenny, and Polly pranced around with their gallants, and the highwaymen swaggered within, and the footpad lurked without, and the gamester and the pluck-pigeon prowled about in search of their prey. But their *historiettes* would be more amusing than edifying.

The gardens are long since shut up and built over, like Cupid's Gardens, and Ranelagh, and Vauxhall, and Cremorne, for there is to be no more innocent happiness allowed to anybody, on account of the serpent who gets into all the gardens and tempts the young folk with that apple. Streets cover up these gardens, as they cover up the great Queen Anne Square which lay beyond ; the turnpike at the end of High-street is gone, and there is not a single remnant of fashion left from end to end. Yet if a man wanted a quiet corner, unfrequented and unknown, there is no more likely spot for him in all London than this little bit of Beaumont-street, Marylebone High-street.

One afternoon there walked slowly across the churchyard from the Euston-road to the High-street, a young gentleman dressed in a most beautiful and expensive fur-lined coat. His hat was new and glossy ; his gloves and boots were good, and he carried a new and very slim umbrella ; a young gentleman clearly of fashion and fortune, if outward seeming be worth anything.

The old woman opened the door for him in one of the little old houses, let him in without question, and he entered the front room on the ground floor without being announced. Clearly, therefore, *ami de famille*, or perhaps a son of the family. There was sitting by the fire in a low chair, his feet upon a cushion, a man well stricken in years. He was asleep when the door opened, but woke with a start and sat upright, clutching the arms of the chair. 'Paul!' he cried. 'I thought you would come to-day. I felt you coming.'

He was certainly enjoying a green old age; his shoulders were rounded, his beard and his abundant hair were both long and white and venerable; his limbs were thin and looked as if they would tremble under him if he stood upright; but his eyes were strong and clear; there was no senility in those eyes; and his face, once awake, was full of life, and interest in life. Some of us, the happiest among us, die upwards, slowly; others, more unhappy, die downwards from the top to the trunk. This old man was dying upwards.

‘Paul, it is a month since you left us. How have you fared? Sit down, you have much to tell. Sit down and begin.’

There was something in his voice and way of speaking which resembled the manner of the younger man; a winning smile; a soft voice; a gentle tone; a sympathetic and earnest look in the eyes. Had the younger man caught his manner from the older and improved it after capture?

Paul removed his coat and sat down.

‘First, then,’ he said, ‘I found it easier to succeed than I thought. My success has been wonderful. Now I will tell you all about it.’

We know how he had succeeded, and can therefore omit his narrative, though there were many points in it omitted in our own. History is nothing but careful selection, and were all the truth told there would be nothing dramatic and nothing interesting.

‘For a beginning, Paul,’ said the old man, ‘you have done well. Nay, my boy, you have shown genius. But how will you keep it up?’

‘By genius again. At present I have only just begun. Oh! it will be the most splendid thing out. And it is all so simple, so simple, so wonderfully simple.’

‘Simple, indeed—to you. But there is no one in the whole world who has your powers, Paul.’

‘The Idiots! The clumsy Idiots! Why, more miracles have been performed in that one house during the last month than by the whole of the Spiritualists, since the rappings first began, with the Esoteric Buddhists thrown in! The Idiots! And they go on practising their tricks and little crafty cheats, and people go on believing in them.’

‘Good, lad, good.’ The old man gently rubbed his hands. ‘This is the right spirit—contempt for the inferior practitioner. You have your powers; he has his tricks. You have your secrets; he has his machinery. Yes, you can drive him out of the field. And after that?’

‘I shall found a new system of Philosophy,’ Paul went on with enthusiasm. ‘I

shall become the Leader of a great School. I call it the Ancient Way. I have a Sacred Book—I am writing it now—it is the book of the Secret Wisdom of King Solomon, taken to Abyssinia by his son Menelek.’

‘Very good. Abyssinia is good. Thibet is played out. Abyssinia is very good.’

‘We shall have a College and chosen Disciples. Only there will be the Illuminati, who have powers corresponding to my own. There will be degrees—from the Initiate to the Adept. Oh! I see it before me clearly. And when this College is established, and my name is made for ever—and I am in the midst of my power—I shall vanish suddenly and be no more heard of, and so be a problem for all ages.’

‘Ye-yes.’ The old man received the conclusion of this programme somewhat doubtfully. ‘Ye-yes, Paul. The College and this School of Philosophers are very good ideas, because you would be the Head of the College, and they must pay their Head. And it would be hard work—very hard work—

keeping it up. But if you were to vanish, my dear boy, how about the dollars?’

The young man’s face, which had been glowing, fell, and he changed colour.

‘The dollars—Oh! the dollars!—it is the curse of being an American, that one is never permitted to think of anything but dollars.’

‘You are young, lad; you are young. When you are old you will think as I think. There *is* nothing but dollars worth considering. Where is your independence if you have got no dollars? What is your glory worth? What will you do in your old age if you have no dollars? I have got few enough, because, like you, when I was young and foolish, I wasted myself in idle display of powers to make the world open its mouth and gape. It is glorious, my son. Your scheme is splendid, and the secret history, if it were ever revealed, would be more glorious to you than the belief of your disciples and the foundation of a Sect. But you are young. A few years—perhaps a single year—will do all that you wish to do here; and then—you

have a long life before you. There is nothing that you can do to make your living. How will you live?’

‘Like the sparrows.’

‘On crumbs and worms. Will you like it?’

‘Well then—I will keep on the College. I will attract students by hundreds. I will take all their fees to myself and build up a great fortune.’

‘Now you talk sense, Paul. Better still—go over to America and found a Sister College. If you want to make a very large fortune, give out that the younger Sister is going to surpass the Elder, by reason of the enormously superior intellect of the Americans. There are plenty of credulous people in both countries, my boy—here they call them Mugs or Jugginses. But there are more Mugs in the States than in England.’

‘I do not like the use of slang,’ said Paul, coldly.

‘No? Let us not speak of Mugs, then. There are more Enquirers in the States than in Great Britain. Will that do?’

‘Besides, there is another reason why I think I could make money—only sometimes,’ he said, apologetically, ‘one gets carried away. There is a girl——’

‘Paul! Paul!’ The old man sat upright, holding tight to the arms of his chair and speaking earnestly. ‘I have warned you again and again. Your Power depends upon your keeping brain clear and heart cold. If you suffer your brain to be filled with the thoughts of a woman: if your heart beats at the sight of a woman: if you fall in love, you are lost. You can only work that Power so long as you remain unmoved by any woman. It was a woman who destroyed Samson. A woman will destroy you. Let all the women love you: pretend to love them in return: but never, never let your imagination dwell upon one of them. Take care, take care.’

‘This is not a common girl. And I am not talking of love at all’—yet he blushed. ‘This is a girl whom I have discovered—one girl of a thousand. She is to other girls what I am to other men. She *has the Power*,

Daddy. Yes ; she has the Power : she does not know it, though she knows that I can at any moment take her out of herself. She has the Power in a wonderful measure. ‘ Oh ! if you had had the luck, the special luck, to have fallen in with such a girl a long time ago, you would not have been contented with advising New York merchants and consulting spirits about the price of stocks. You would have gone for higher game. There is no better clairvoyante in the world, I am certain, although she suspects nothing of her powers. She is the daughter of a low-class Medium, three-fourths humbug, one-fourth Sensitive, and she hates the thing because she has long since found out her mother’s tricks. But in my hands——’ He paused and sighed.

‘ Is she young, Paul ? Is she young and beautiful ? ’

‘ She is young and beautiful. In better dress she would be — yes—she would be the most beautiful girl you ever saw. She believes in me, too. Perhaps, perhaps ’—he blushed again—‘ perhaps, she loves me. I do

not know. You never had such a woman in your hands, I guess.'

'Perhaps not. Perhaps I have. Well, and how is the girl to help in the College?'

'You ask me such a question! What are the things which would most attract the people? The Manifestations. Only a Sensitive like you—and your pupil and my pupil—could manage these—to call it management. Then think of Clairvoyance—I know what that girl can do. I have experimented upon her with nobody looking on. And there is Thought Reading. I could teach her how to read thought—I am certain I could—better than I can do it myself. And there is Prophecy. There is a clear field for you. I don't mean spotting the winner, but high-class Prophecy, which has never yet been attempted. I am quite sure that anyone who knows all the facts, that is, more than the enquirer knows, can predict what is going to happen. There is Telepathy. That is a new subject which requires to be developed. There is plain and simple Mesmerism, with

mesmeric healing and mesmeric anæsthetics. Can you ask what such a girl could do for the College? Why, her example alone would create a crowd of clairvoyantes.'

'Paul, you are indeed a genius.'

'There are plenty of girls like her, though not so wonderful. There is Cicely Langston, for instance.'

'Who is she?'

'She is the blind girl. I have as much influence over her as I have over Hetty.'

His voice dropped a little as he pronounced the name of the girl. This was a bad symptom, properly understood.

'Does she, too, believe in you? Is she, too, in love with you, Paul?'

'Love? No, I think not. She believes in me and she trusts me. Now, Daddy, be sympathetic. You used to be sympathetic enough in the old New York days.'

'Yes, because I had a pupil who promised wonderfully well, and only wanted encouragement. I gave him that, and all the help I could. And now, I am happy to say, there's

not a man in the world can show a candle to him; not a man in the world who's got a greater influence over people, or who's more highly sensitised.'

'There isn't, Daddy,' said Paul. 'Thanks to you there isn't one.' He laid his hand affectionately on the old man's arm.

'But don't forget the dollars, Paul. Remember the people are longing to pay over their dollars to some one—anyone who can make them laugh or cry, or frighten them.'

'I believe that is so,' said Paul, thoughtfully.

'Of course it is. They make their money only to give it away, in exchange for pictures, or statues, or to buy laughter, tears, terror, comfort, and hope. We find these things for them, Paul, my boy. I have taught you how to do it. Catch their eyes and their minds, and hold them tight. Hold them with a Grip. The man who has got the quality of Grip is the successful man, whether he is actor, or novelist, or dramatist, or conjuror, or whether

he knows the secrets of the occult philosophy. Grip is the thing—Grip.'

'You are always right, Daddy.'

'Hold them with a Grip and don't let go till the dollars are all raked in.'

'Well, Daddy, but let me have my little play first.'

'No, boy, no. Don't waste time.'

'Think of the splendid position, the College of the Ancient Way, the Book of Wisdom, the troops of Illuminati, and the Adepts, and the Clairvoyants.'

'If you will only stick to it, Paul. But you won't. I am afraid you will want to play a deeper game.'

'And then think—only think—of disappearing suddenly, leaving not a trace behind except, perhaps, a postal address to Abyssinia!'

'Yes, Paul, if you could afford it. But you can't. Besides, there is another danger.'

'Oh! I know; have no fear, Daddy.'

'It is a terrible danger for so young a man. Your Power, I tell you again, is like

the strength of Samson, and when you fall in love with a woman you will lose it. Samson's is a very instructive history for you, Paul. Keep your heart free and cold and your brain clear. Else you will lose your power as Samson lost his strength.'

'Never fear, Daddy. I love my Power too well; whether I disappear or whether I stay on, I shall keep that, even if I have to turn my thoughts and my eyes from the contemplation of beauty. Any way, my College would be better than telling New York operators when to buy and sell. Fancy wasting such a beautiful gift on bulls and bears!'

.
They talked all the afternoon—the master and the scholar, who had long gone beyond anything the master could teach him—and soared upwards in flights far beyond the old man's powers of imagination. Yet the master had his points.

They talked of many things: but one thing they avoided. Two of a trade always

agree to avoid one subject. It is that side of their business which they do not present to the world. Outsiders may talk, generally, and with an affectation of knowing them, of the secrets of a trade: those who are actually engaged in any trade avoid the subject: they know that secrets may be called by another and a much more ugly word. So many trades, so many secrets. So many secrets—so many—no—let them remain secrets. Thus shall every craft have the power of reforming itself, and of becoming honest to the smallest detail. Those who are in the line of Spiritualism, Theosophy, Occult Philosophy, and the like, have, like drapers, grocers, and the whole tribe of trade, their trade secrets. Even those who dwell upon the highest Planes and possess Powers to which the general practitioners only pretend, avoid speaking with another of the machinery, so to speak, by which those Powers are illustrated. A certain amount of stage management, in fact, is absolutely necessary before the higher flights of creative genius

can be attempted. In all Art, of any kind, there must be grouping.

At last Paul got up.

‘I must go, Daddy,’ he said. ‘I shall come to see you again before long, now that things are going on so well.’

‘Do, Paul, do. By the way, I’ve a letter here from a man called Medlock. He says you know him.’

‘There was a man of that name went about with Kate Flight, the Medium. He was her secretary or clerk. What does he want?’

‘Business. He is over here. Says he could run you—he doesn’t know where you are—on advantageous terms next winter.’

‘We’ll see. Medlock—Haynes Medlock it was—I wonder if he is Hetty’s father, who ran away. Medlock!’ Paul started. ‘Daddy, find out all you can about the man and tell me when he comes.’

‘I will, Paul.’

‘Don’t forget, Daddy. It may be most

useful to me to know all about the man. Do you think you will be able to walk soon?’

‘I could walk now but this cursed east wind keeps me at home.’

‘Do you think you could make just one little expedition for my sake?’

‘What is it?’

‘I have often thought that if the learned Abyssinian, the Falasha, Isák Ibn Menelek, he who possesses Solomon’s Book of Wisdom, and is the chief prophet of the Ancient Way, would come to the study some morning and present the Book in person, it might have a good effect.’

The old gentleman laughed merrily.

‘Your hair and beard are beautiful. Your eyes are as keen and bright as any philosopher could desire. I would provide a robe, and as for the Book, it is nearly ready. It is in parchment—a Roll, you know—venerable with age, but written in modern English, because all languages are alike to us.’

‘I will come, Paul, if you will arrange for me to come and go unseen.’

‘That will be very easy. You can keep the cab waiting close to the house, and—oh! yes, it can be easily arranged.’

‘Then it shall be done. Have your fling, my dear boy, and found your College. But for making the dollars we shall have to establish that other Institution which is to surpass and outstrip her English sister, because of the enormous intellectual superiority of the American people. Next to Grip, Paul, comes the Spread Eagle.’

CHAPTER VII.

THE INSTRUCTION OF THE VESTAL.

‘HERR PAULUS.’

Sibyl stood at the open door of the study. It was after lunch. Paul was sitting beside the fire in the easiest of chairs, one especially made for Mr. Cyrus Brudenel when that student should come here in order to read his great books on the Supernatural. On the floor there lay an open novel which had fallen from his hands. The youthful Sage was asleep. Thus slept Endymion. I do not know whether this comparison occurred to Sibyl's mind, but I think that even she—the scornful and the hostile—must have been moved to admiration at the wonderful beauty of this young man as he lay back, the long hair rolling off his forehead and his eyes closed.

‘Herr Paulus,’ she repeated.

‘Miss Brudenel!’ He awoke with a start and sprang to his feet. ‘You here? I was——’

‘Please do not take the trouble to explain that your Astral body was in Abyssinia or Thibet, Herr Paulus.’

‘I will not,’ he replied, now broad awake. ‘I was only going to explain that the fire was warm and the atmosphere of this collection of venerable rubbish was drowsy, and the novel I was reading was dull—and so I fell asleep.’

‘I have come in obedience to my father, Herr Paulus. He is continually urging me to receive instruction from you in something wonderful. I believe you are teaching it to him, but at present nothing seems to have settled in his mind. Would it be convenient for you to begin this afternoon?’

‘All my time is at your disposal,’ he replied. ‘Pray take a chair. I can only teach, however, those who are willing to learn.’

‘Did I not explain that I come in obedi-

ence to my father? That shows, I suppose, willingness.'

'Not at all. You are not only unwilling, but you are hostile.'

Sibyl was more than unconquered. She was unconquerable. The others had all, as we know, been subdued. Even Tom had so far yielded to Paul's influence as to laugh and talk with him while he professed to be watching him, and to call him by the Anglican form of his name. Sibyl alone never relaxed from her attitude of open enmity.

'Miss Brudenel,' Paul went on, 'there is nothing, I assure you, that I can teach you. It is perfectly useless for you to take the trouble of staying here.'

'Of course, I know that. But, just to please my father, let me pretend that you are trying to teach me things. You may tell me about your Friends and all the wonderful things they pretend to do. Pray go on, I am listening.'

'No,' said Paul, 'it is impossible. I can only talk in that way with those who are in

sympathy with me and with them. You are not. You openly deride them, and you do not attempt to hide the hatred you nourish towards myself. Do you not understand that your proposition is insulting? But you do not mind that, perhaps. Your whole attitude since I have been here proves so much.'

'I do not wish to insult anyone, Herr Paulus. I am here in obedience to my father. I cannot help it if I am out of sympathy with you.'

'You might have become one of us. There was a moment, about a month ago, when I fancied that your heart was softening, but it passed away, and now I shall make no further attempt to dispel your prejudice. I must endure it.'

'That will cost you very little trouble. Meantime, if you refuse to instruct me, what am I to do? I have promised my father to sit at your feet and listen. I must do that even if you teach me nothing.'

'We might talk about other things, perhaps.'

‘I do not know any other things which I wish to discuss with you,’ Sibyl replied, sharply.

‘Shall we, then, sit in silence?’

‘Yes. That will be much better. Don’t speak to me at all.’

Paul sat down again in his easy chair, while Sibyl sat opposite, her hands folded in her lap; and for a space neither spoke.

So far Sibyl had certainly the worst of the conversation, for her opponent showed not the least sign of ruffled temper, and even looked as if he thoroughly enjoyed the conditions of the lesson and was quite happy and at his ease. Nothing is more irritating than to be cross with a person who keeps his temper.

Naturally, it was the woman who first broke the silence.

‘How long,’ she asked, looking at the clock, ‘should the first lesson last?’

‘As long as you please.’

‘Then let it finish now. Herr Paulus,’—she changed her manner instantly. ‘Never

mind me and my—my distrust ; but tell me what it is you have done to my father.'

'You have observed a change?'

'It is so great a change that I want you to tell me what you have said or done. I have asked him, but he does not seem able to speak coherently about it. He is much happier ; he has lost his restless manner ; he seems, for the first time, satisfied and contented. What have you done to him?'

'We talk here of things which you do not understand. They are foolishness and pretence to you. But they lift up the soul for us.'

Sibyl made no direct reply. Always this man's explanations put her in the wrong, and made her feel humble for the moment and angry afterwards—else angry first and then humble.

'Is it all, then, to end in vague talk which lifts the soul?' she asked.

'I do not say so.'

'You came with a Message. You said so. You have done all kinds of wonderful things to show that you were a properly accredited

person. You talked of conversing with people far off, and with the dead; of making youth and age, life and death, only phrases.'

'It is true. I said all this and more.'

'But everything is as far off as ever. You are only like the Medium who brings messages from the dead which tell nobody anything.'

'What does your father say?'

'He says——' Sibyl hesitated because she saw another trap. 'He says that he spends his mornings in Abyssinia or somewhere.'

'I suppose you can trust your father's word? So you see things are not after all so far off as they were, except to yourself.'

'I can trust my father's word, and yet—yet—oh! it is nonsense. How can he go to Abyssinia?'

'Why does he say that he goes there, then?'

'Herr Paulus'—Sibyl looked him straight in the face with a spot of crimson in either cheek—'Herr Paulus, I think you deceive him in some way.'

Paul smiled gravely and compassionately, as one smiles at an outburst from a wayward child.

‘It is as well to say a thing as to think it. Of course, I have known all along what you think. So be it. Let it be. I deceive your father. Yet I make him happier, less restless, and more confident. He has abandoned his old gods; he has destroyed his idols, and will consult the spirits no more.’

‘Yes, that is true; we shall have no more séances here. And oh! Herr Paulus, if it is quite true that you want nothing for yourself, be content with what you have done, and go away. I implore you to go away while my father’s mind is relieved of one superstition.’

‘You would add—“before he falls into another.” Miss Brudenel, you have spoken too late. That is, it is impossible for me to obey you. Things must develop—nothing ever stops still—he must follow in the path we have entered. But do not be afraid. For your father and for this house all will be pure

gain, as you will find and acknowledge—even you.’

‘Never!’

‘Meantime, is there anything that I can do for you?’

‘You may cease to fill Cicely’s head with hopes of her brother’s return.’

‘That, too, is impossible. Her brother may return any day. His ship is not far from port. Sir Percival thinks that he has cut himself off from his family altogether, and we must go to find him if he will not come here. You may, if you please, come with us.’

‘Oh! Still mystery and pretence. Then, will you leave off mesmerising Hetty?’

‘No, I will not.’ Paul put his foot down firmly. ‘Hetty has a gift that must be most carefully developed. Do not ask me, Miss Brudenel, to interfere with what concerns my Teaching.’

‘You will stay here, then?’

‘Until Lady Augusta orders me to go.’

‘Then you will stay here for ever.’

‘Perhaps. I know not.’

Sibyl looked round the room filled with the books of her father's priceless collection.

'Oh!' she said, 'when shall we get out of this hateful atmosphere of mystery? If you knew,' she pointed to the shelves, 'how I hate the awful rubbish that is here!'

'It is pretty bad,' Paul replied, blandly. 'In fact, there is nowhere a better collection of venerable rubbish than your father's.'

'And yet you encourage him with your Solomon's Book of Wisdom and your story about Prince Menelek, and Izák the Falasha. How *can* you talk such stuff?'

'It is sad stuff' to you, is it not? I am sorry. On the day when it ceases to seem sad stuff you will become sympathetic. But that day will never come.'

'No, never.'

'As for us, we find it full of comfort and wisdom and knowledge and power.'

'I cannot believe it. No, Herr Paulus, you are either a person of wonderful credulity, or you are——'

'Let me finish your sentence.'

‘No—let it remain unfinished. As for me, I am persuaded that nothing can ever come of looking beyond the Veil. There will be no new Revelation. The gulf between the living and the dead will never be bridged except by death. No voices will ever again come to us from the other side. Until we die ourselves we shall never know more than we know already.’

‘That is your creed. Let us possess our own. I shall not try to convert you by any arguments. I leave you to the care of—Science.’

Sibyl coloured. Yet his eyes seemed to have no second meaning.

‘Of Science?’ she asked

‘Yours is the creed of Science. She is constantly discovering the most wonderful things, and will not allow us to discover anything. Science holds conversation thousands of miles apart by means of the little wire. We do the same thing in a simpler manner without a wire.’

‘So you say, Herr Paulus.’

‘And you do not believe me. Very good. You think that nothing will change your attitude?’

‘Nothing.’

‘Nothing will change your hostility to myself?’

‘Nothing, unless it might be your departure.’

‘Miss Brudenel, sometimes, when I know all the circumstances of a case, I permit myself to prophesy. Let me be a prophet in your case.’

‘If you please.’

‘The time will come—it will come very soon—when your hostility will cease altogether, and be changed into gratitude and friendship.’

‘Oh!’

‘Yes, gratitude, certainly. Because you will associate my name with the removal of certain obstacles of which you know.’

‘What do you mean?’ Again Sibyl blushed.

‘And the adjustment of certain coming troubles of which as yet you know nothing.’

‘Such a prophecy means nothing.’

‘You shall see. Even then you will not believe. Now, Miss Brudenel, your first lesson has come to an end. I have taught you nothing, but I have ventured on a little prophecy which I beg of you most earnestly to remember when the time comes. You will then acknowledge that I must have known, when I uttered that prophecy, what had already happened and what was going to happen.’

When Sibyl left him, Paul sat down again by the fire and continued to read his novel till five o’clock. Then he went in search of tea and the accompaniment of feminine talk, which he loved, with warmth and ease, and the flattery of his disciples. How little do we want to make us happy !

CHAPTER VIII.

A TRIFLING INCIDENT.

EVERYBODY remembers that fateful morning when the news of the Great Smash brought dismay upon thousands, and opened the doors of the Workhouse to hundreds; when the weeping of women and the curses of men were borne upon the wings of the wind, and flew abroad into all lands, and hung over the great City of London like a fog; when the guilty directors would have called upon the rocks to cover them—if there had been any rocks—from the wrath of the shareholders; and from one end of the land to the other one event alone occupied all minds; though the Czar might imagine vain things, and though the dynamiter was abroad.

On that morning Paul came downstairs a

little later than usual, and appeared in the breakfast-room with his customary cheerful mien, ready with an affectionate smile for Lady Augusta, a cold greeting for Sibyl, and a warm pressure of the hand for Cicely. At the aspect of the assembled party, however, his flow of spirits experienced a most disagreeable check. It was just as if a sparkling and vivacious mountain stream, prepared to run gaily down the valley babbling over the stones, with here and there a trout, and here and there a grayling, were to meet a big insurmountable and ugly dam, behind which it would be compelled to accumulate—mountain-stream-language for labour—until a lake should be formed.

There was not, on any face, not even on that of Lady Augusta, the least response to Paul's smile of greeting. They all turned and saw him, and then looked blankly at each other.

Something had happened.

When one says 'something,' one understands the word disastrous. On the faces of

all present, in their attitude, in their eyes, that fact was apparent. Confusion, consternation, amazement, dismay — this beloved goddess has all these names and more—reigned in that breakfast-room. She manifested her dread sway in various ways, according to the disposition and the age of each. Mr. Brudenel sat upright; his pale cheeks, his terror-stricken eyes, his open lips, his trembling hands, would have caused him, in the last century, which was a time of great tenderness and deep feeling, to be likened unto a stuck pig—pity and sympathy could not be more fittingly illustrated than by this simile. Whatever had happened, it affected him most painfully. Lady Augusta was standing over him, her hands clasped, and a prolonged ‘Oh!’ still visible upon her lips, though the sound of it was only faintly heard echoed among the cups and saucers. Sibyl, in charge of the teapot, as usual, had risen in her place and was now looking—not at her father—but at Tom—with eyes full of pain and amazement. Cicely held out her hands

helplessly, as if feeling for support. Tom, who was also standing, had the paper in his hands—he had caught it as it fell from his guardian's hands and fluttered towards the floor; and he was reading something which appeared to interest him greatly, but did not cause his eyes to dance with mirth and joy. That is not, somehow, the function of the daily paper. When I establish that morning journal which will trample the life out of all the rest, I shall call it the Daily Saddener.

‘Something has happened?’ Paul asked.

Considering how great a thing had happened: how extraordinary were his own powers, and how peculiar were his facilities for obtaining information: how ready of access for him was the Universal Intelligence Department, this question was weak. He felt immediately how weak it was, and wished that he had taken his place in silence.

‘Oh! Paul!’ said Lady Augusta. Was there reproach in her voice?

He suspected nothing: in spite of the knowledge he had obtained and the advice

he had given to Mr. James Berry, he had at this moment no suspicion at all of what had happened.

Tom looked up from the paper.

‘Something *has* happened,’ he said.

‘Is it in the paper?’

Tom laughed, but not mirthfully.

‘You don’t mean to say you have been left in ignorance of it?’

‘I have been told nothing.’

‘I wonder you were not told last night. I wonder you were not permitted to prophesy the event. It would have been something to have learned what was coming—even a fortnight ago. Come to think of it, Paul, your friends have behaved in a most unhandsome way not to have warned you of it.’

‘Meantime, I know nothing.’

‘What’s the use of Friends who won’t tell a man beforehand, and prevent people from coming to grief?’ Tom continued.

‘Oh!’ Mr. Brudenel groaned. ‘All this time wasted in discussion about philosophy, when a single word of caution might have

saved us. I remember when one of Chick's spirits warned an inquirer against a voyage in which the ship was cast away. One of Emanuel Chick's spirits did this! And your great and powerful Friends could do nothing!'

'Paul!' said Lady Augusta, solemnly, 'a great and most unexpected blow has fallen upon us. Nothing could be more unexpected. Hardly any disaster could be heavier. It is so terrible a calamity that I cannot refrain from asking, like my husband, why your Friends should have permitted it!'

'I know now,' said Paul, 'Brudenel and Company have failed.'

'You have seen the paper, then?'

'No, I have just been told. The Company has failed. It is a complete collapse. Three fortunes—Sibyl's, Cicely's, and your own, Tom—were invested in it and are lost, I dare-say hopelessly, because the shareholders will get nothing. That is the news in to-day's paper, is it not?'

'That is the blow, Paul.'

‘It is only money, then, after all,’ he said, astonished. ‘Why do you look so distressed?’

‘Only money!’ said Tom. ‘Only our little all that has vanished!’

‘What of that? Let us have breakfast.’

He sat down, and without paying any more attention to the distress of his friends, he looked round the table and considered what he would take for his breakfast. He began with a little fish, keeping an eye on some sausages, remembering that the ham on the sideboard was excellent, and thinking that a boiled egg, followed by a little confiture, would fitly conclude the meal. He had as yet—but then he was under five-and-twenty—a most excellent appetite, and he tackled breakfast with regularity, punctuality, and zeal.

‘Let us all take breakfast, and after breakfast we will discuss the real importance of this trifling incident!’

Tom laughed.

‘Trifling, sir? Trifling?’ cried Mr. Brudeneel, looking upon him wrathfully. ‘Let

me tell you, sir, it is you who are trifling. The fortunes of my daughter and my ward are gone. The Concern which bears my name is ruined, and you call it a trifling incident !’

‘Trifling, indeed. An episode not to be heeded by the wise man.’

Mr. Brudenel gasped, but said nothing in reply. The sight of that calm and undisturbed face, master of itself, though all his friends’ fortunes were lost, and the authoritative repetition of the adjective, subdued him.

‘There is a short leading article on it,’ said Tom. ‘I will read it.’

“The presentation, yesterday, of a winding-up petition for the great trading Company known as Brudenel’s—after the name of the founder—together with the fact that it was unopposed, have struck with consternation others besides the unfortunate shareholders themselves. For if this house, apparently so prospering, thus suddenly collapses, who knows if others may not be in the same rotten condition? It has long been certain that

the carrying trade has been bad, not owing so much to the depression of trade as to the multiplication of ships. But no one, it is safe to say, except, perhaps, those who were acute observers in the City, predicted the downfall of Brudenel's. The secrets of the Board have been well kept. Meantime, many rumours are afloat. It is confidently asserted that the high dividends hitherto declared must have been paid out of capital. It is said that the bankruptcy of the Company is complete. A meeting of shareholders has been already hastily summoned to consider what steps should be taken as regards the conduct of the Directors. The firm whose business was taken over by this Company was founded by the late Mr. Abraham Brudenel, one of those successful, enterprising and keen-sighted merchants who have made the English name. He was succeeded by his sons, the present Sir Abraham and Mr. Cyrus Brudenel, who formed it into a Company while it was still in a perfectly solvent and flourishing condition. For thirty years the Company has

seemed to be advancing: its capital has been greatly increased: it has always paid large and steady dividends. The shares have gone up, until only two days ago they were quoted at 327, and business at that figure was actually done on the Exchange. So sudden and unexpected a collapse is almost without a parallel. We trust that a searching inquiry will be made into the causes of the failure, and that some explanation will be demanded as to the high dividends. It is pitiful to think of the unhappy shareholders, many of whom are widows, ladies, and orphans, whose shares in Brudenel's were regarded as perfectly safe and trustworthy, and who find themselves now in helpless and hopeless poverty. It is understood that one of the brothers, Mr. Cyrus Brudenel, has retained a large stake in the business, though he has taken no part in the direction since the formation of the Company."

'This is your trifle, Paul,' said Tom, concluding.

'Is it?' Paul replied, carelessly. 'Let

us go on with breakfast. People have lost money. Some who intended to do nothing all their lives will have to work. Some who thought they were going to wear silk will wear stuff. Some who thought they were going to die in their own houses will die in the Work-house: some——’

‘Paul,’ said Lady Augusta, ‘do not be too high for us. Consider—consider, we have not all reached that level. Be patient with us.’

But Paul shook his head impatiently.

‘This fuss,’ he said, ‘about money!’

‘My Company!’ Mr. Brudenel answered. ‘My father’s concern — bankrupt — ruined. The children’s money all gone! Cicely, you are a pauper, my dear! Tom, your guardian has thrown away your fortune: you’ve got nothing but your brains and your hands.’

‘Lucky for Tom,’ said Paul.

‘Why did they not help us?’ asked Mr. Brudenel. ‘They *ought* to have helped us. What have they done for us? Nothing! What are they going to do for us? Nothing!’

Paul went to the sideboard and helped himself.

‘This is an excellent ham,’ he said. ‘The English ham at its best is really superior to any other, though I have tasted very good hams in Russia.’

Nobody replied. One or two, however, thought this conduct and these words an exhibition of heartlessness.

‘When it comes to something practical,’ said Tom, ‘your friends, Paul, are not so good as poor old Chick’s spirits.’

‘Practical! You call money practical! But I forgot, Tom, you believe nothing. To you money is, doubtless, a very practical thing.’

He continued to eat his breakfast with undiminished appetite and vigour amid the stricken family. Sibyl poured out his tea for him with set lips and red cheeks: Cicely hung her head: Lady Augusta drooped: but Paul ate and drank, and was as cheerful as if nothing at all had happened.

Then Mr. Cyrus Brudenel, after the

manner of the Ancients, and quite forgetful of Divine Prophecy and the Precepts of Izák Ibn Menelek, just as if the Abyssinian Sage had not taken him in hand at all, began a Monologue or Lament over the lost Company. It was almost an Epic. It opened with a narrative of the circumstances which led his father to leave his native village and repair to London with twopence in his pocket. Nobody ever really succeeds in London if he is so unfortunate as to have more than twopence to begin with. The paternal Brudenel, the original Abraham, became a shopboy, a clerk—Heaven knows what—and in the fulness of time founded the great Concern which bears his name. At first it was not a great Concern, but only a small Venture which was nursed, followed, and developed, with as much care as Abraham had been wont to lavish upon the turkeys in his native county of Norfolk, until it grew into a Concern. Then, Mr. Cyrus Brudenel related, the time came when his father had to die. He did this with the utmost reluctance, not because he was

afraid to die, but because it seemed so great a pity to leave the Concern until it was fully developed, and there were still some shores and ports in the world that knew not yet the name of Brudenel. The death-bed scene was truly touching. Then, changing his key, like a minstrel who knows how to touch the hearts of his hearers, Mr. Cyrus Brudenel went on to relate how he and his brother carried on the Concern for awhile, but resolved at length to make it into a Company, and did so, taking a large sum of money and so many fully paid-up shares, which they immediately sold at a large premium, and bought land in the days when land was still valuable: and how his brother got a baronetcy: and how he himself devoted his life to the science of Spiritualistic Philosophy: and how he invested, unfortunately, as trustee and executor, the whole of his ward's fortune, and that of his daughter in the Company. 'And now,' he concluded, 'I have made them paupers, because the Company is bankrupt. My father's business is ruined; our name has

become a bye-word: thousands of innocent people who are wrecked with the Company will curse us for ever. I am an executor and guardian who has thrown away the property of his wards. You, Tom, will have to work for your bread. You, Cicely, have no longer anything. You, Sibyl, have lost all that your mother left you. Children, I will try to make it up to you; but oh!' he said, 'it is a disgrace to the family name from which we shall never recover—never!'

While he wailed and lamented, his wife leaned over him. Paul, who had eyes in the back of his head and ears all over, observed that Tom was holding Sibyl's hand under the table, and he heard them whispering.

'Sibyl, will you wait for me? Do you know what this means for us? Do you see what a barrier it raises? Will you wait till I have regained by work what we have lost?'

And she replied:

'For a hundred years, Tom, if it must be, I will wait!'

The observer and listener made as if he

saw and heard nothing. Presently, however, when Mr. Cyrus Brudenel had run down, and stopped exhausted, rather than satiated, with lament, Paul said, quietly :

‘No, Mr. Brudenel, disgrace cannot be brought upon one man by the *laches* of any others. I perceive, however, that it will be useless for me to join you in the study this morning. Your mind seems utterly overwhelmed for the moment by one of the commonest of human reverses. Izák Ibn Menelek will not want you in your present temper.’

Then Mr. Cyrus Brudenel sprang to his feet and broke out in revolt.

‘Izák Ibn Menelek!’ he cried, in contempt. ‘What has he taught me? Nothing! Not so much as Chick’s spirits. How has he helped me? In no way. What will he do for me? Nothing. Do not speak to me any more of Izák Ibn Menelek. Let us have done with this pretender of Abyssinia. The spirit rappers and the Ancient Philosophers are all impostors together. There is no help in any of them. Give me back my daughter’s

fortune—you—with your pretence and your sneers about the trifling incident. Give it back or never speak to me again! If you can help us, let that be your way of help. If you have no help for us, go! Go—you and all your tribe! Depart, and leave us to be ruined by ourselves!’

He rushed from the room. They heard his footsteps making in the direction of the study, and they all looked at each other in consternation first, and at Paul next.

‘I will take a little marmalade,’ he said.

Sibyl’s eyes ought to have withered and consumed him as she followed her father.

‘This insensibility does you great credit,’ said Tom. ‘I can’t quite reach it myself. But I do wish that you had—say, a couple of millions—and that I could imitate your example and look on unmoved while you lost it all.’

‘Ask yourself what you have lost, Tom,’ Paul replied. ‘You have been lazily questioning Science. You will now persecute her. The law of existence is that a man shall

develop himself under the goad of necessity. You will now become a great professor instead of an amateur. You ought to rejoice.'

'Every man who works for money is a slave,' said Tom. 'I have become a slave.'

'That is because men are such fools that they do not combine. When they have learned to combine there will be no slaves.'

'Wise Philosopher! Nevertheless, I will betake myself to the family solicitor and see what can be saved out of the wreck. And so far from rejoicing, if I can discover any engine or contrivance of law which can be used for clapping those directors in quod, I shall set that engine in motion.'

'I do not object. It will be a legitimate exercise for your brain.'

'Now that we are left alone—we three'—Paul continued, rising from the table where he had displayed so remarkable a callousness—'we can talk. We understand each other. First, Lady Augusta, tell me what you think.'

She hesitated.

'It is beautiful,' she said at length, 'to

hear and to talk about voluntary poverty and renunciation. Your Friends, who are superior to fortune, are lovely to contemplate. But when it comes home to one—frankly, Paul, I am not—we are none of us, so far advanced in Philosophy as to bear with patience such a blow.’

‘My friend,’ said Paul, ‘it is not a blow. Believe me. That alone is a blow which can deprive you of any portion of the wisdom you have learned, or could make it impossible for you to advance. If, for instance, you had lost all and had to work for your living, it would have been a blow, because your whole nature would have become degraded by work for which you have not been trained. But this will not, I apprehend, affect your present style of living.’

‘No. My husband has his land, and Sibyl is his heiress. She has only lost her mother’s fortune of ten thousand pounds. It is Cicely who is most affected, because she has lost her all. Yesterday this poor child was possessed of an ample *dot*, and she now has nothing.

Yesterday she was independent, and to-day she is dependent.'

'I cannot,' said Paul, reflectively, 'consider that my Friends would think it worth while to pay the least attention to this incident. I have never known them interfere in matters of money. To them, as to all wise men, social conditions which require money are foolishness, and those who suffer by these conditions, that is, those who have to work in order that others may save money, and those who fall into despair when they lose it, ought to combine for the purpose of changing their social conditions. At the same time, so great is the interest felt for this household, which is destined, I believe, to be the centre of a light which shall radiate everywhere and fill the whole world, that I cannot—I really cannot—believe that my Friends are ignorant of this accident, nor can I believe that it will prove to be a disaster. I would rather believe that it was permitted by them for your own help and instruction.'

‘If he could only think so!’ said Lady Augusta. ‘If you could show us that!’

Nothing endeared Paul to these ladies so much as his passage from the light and cheerful air which he wore in society, or the apparent callousness with which he regarded certain mundane things, to the grave and serious discourse which he held with them *en petit comité*. Women like men to be grave and serious. No one except Lady Augusta, Cicely, and Hetty saw him when he became, not a Prophet or a Teacher, dogmatic and authoritative, but an humble seeker after truth, sympathetic and full of pity.

‘As regards Tom, for instance,’ he said, ‘can anything better be desired for a clever man than that he should be compelled to develop himself to the utmost? What is the history of the world’s greatest men? They have all been poor: most of them have sprung from the soil: it is when men are young that they acquire the habit of work. Tom, as I told him, will no longer read and lazily question Nature. He will persecute her.

He will no longer look on while others dig into her sides. He will take a spade and dig among them. As for Sibyl——’ he paused.

‘As for Sibyl?’ Lady Augusta asked.

‘I do not know Sibyl’s heart. It is a closed book to me. Yours, Lady Augusta, I can read—and yours, Cicely.’ Strange! there was the least little touch of jealousy in both of these ladies as he named them. Would each of them, then, have preferred that hers should be the only heart open to his inspection? ‘I cannot tell how the loss of this money will affect Sibyl. Then let us remember you—Cicely.’

‘Yes. Tell me, Paul,’ she replied, ‘how I am to bear the loss of my fortune. I am so helpless in my blindness that I have always thought it my chief blessing that I should always be able to command attendance. Tell me. Teach me—Paul—and I will resign myself.’

‘Let me try, Cicely.’ The simple faith of the girls who cling to the knees of father confessors, directors, vicars, curates, pastors, ministers, shepherds, and prophets, sometimes

touches their hearts and dims their eyes. It is a truly beautiful thing ; but are they infallible? And that ecclesiastical edifice of theirs which seems so sublime, is its history quite what they have taught their women? ‘Let me try, Cicely,’ Paul repeated, with a touch of humility. ‘Consider. You have looked forward to a lifetime in which you could buy whatever you wanted : you were to be independent of others’ help : you would pay people to amuse you, to find food for thought, to teach you. Very well. That is all changed. You will now be entirely dependent on the services that are given for love. You are not abandoned to strangers : you are among those who love you and will never let you suffer or want. Your very dependence upon them will endear you to them—their constant care of you will make you feel how real and deep and unselfish is their love——’

‘My child,’ Lady Augusta murmured, laying her arm round Cicely’s neck.

‘You will learn the difference between what is paid for and what is given. You will

no longer seek to be amused all day. Your character will grow; you will become what you were intended to be. You will meditate and climb upwards. When you pass out of this life, your eyes will be opened upon a Plane far higher, among spirits far loftier.'

The Good Young Man of the Good Novel could not possibly speak more beautifully.

'Oh! Paul.' The girl's heart glowed within her and her eyes filled with tears. The words may seem inadequate to produce their effect, but consider the soft, musical voice; the tones of one who is earnestly feeling after the truth, and the strange magnetic power of the speaker.

'Let us, dear ladies,' Paul continued in another voice, less sympathetic, less tender. 'Let us consider the remaining case—that of Mr. Brudenel.'

'Be very gentle, Paul,' said Lady Augusta.

'I will be very gentle. I confess, however, that I have been grievously disappointed. You know that he has been under direct instruction for some weeks past—daily instruction.'

‘Yes, we know. He has told me all.’

‘The strange thing about this instruction is that he forgets when he returns from Abyssinia all that he has learned. I confess that I was under the impression that his mind was being gradually cleared for the reception of the Hidden Wisdom, just as one clears away the jungle and weeds before planting. I thought that a day would come when his mind would be quite rid of prejudices, and he would become receptive. The Ancient Way is impossible to a mind clogged with prejudice.’

‘Well, Paul?’

‘You saw that terrible exhibition of prejudice. How far has his mind been cleared? I am ready to make allowance. Cicero, who was a philosopher, gave way to inordinate grief when his daughter died, not remembering that death is but a narrow gateway between the two lives. Can we tell how many such gateways we have passed, and how many lie yet before us? Yet, with all allowance made—after he has been taught—after

the lesson has been so earnestly impressed upon him, that wealth is nothing, that this house, with his pictures, furniture, his grand library full of useless and lying literature, his broad lands, and his income, are all nothing—absolutely nothing, except that they afford him shelter, food, clothes, and time to meditate:—I say, after this has been impressed upon him with all the earnestness and authority possible, to witness such an exhibition of prejudice is more than disappointing. It makes one despair.’

‘Bear with him, Paul. You who are so sympathetic must feel with him and for him. It is not his own money that he laments. He has been guardian and executor for these three young people, and he has been the innocent means of losing the fortunes entrusted to him. Is this nothing? And then the Company was his own; it was the movement of his father, it represented the lifework of the man whom most my husband venerates—his father. That this Company should break is no common affliction for my husband’

‘It is possible,’ said Paul, ‘that it may be permitted by the Friends in order to show how little real progress he has made. He has been rudely startled out of his complacency. Yes, yes, and he will feel it; and—and—oh!’ Paul started. ‘I see it, I see it all clearly, clearly—oh, so clearly——’ He stretched out his hands and threw up his head, and there appeared upon his face the glorified look of one who beholds a vision. ‘Yes, my master; yes, my Friends; I see—I see——’

‘Paul!’

He dropped his hands and lowered his head and looked around him as one who awakes from sleep and wonders what has befallen him.

‘Paul! What is it? Oh! what have you seen?’

‘Lady Augusta,’ he said, solemnly, ‘do you believe in my truth and honesty? Do you always, always—answer me truly—always believe in me?’

‘Oh! Paul,’ she bowed her face in her hands. ‘There are times, I confess, when I

have a dreadful doubt; for instance, when this blow fell upon us an hour ago. Forgive me; it is a grievous, a terrible thing to doubt you. If you were false nothing would be true—nothing could be true.'

'Dear Lady, look into my eyes, take both my hands—tell me do you doubt me now?' Never were eyes more clear and limpid, more straight and honest.

'No,' she replied, low and murmurous. 'No, I cannot doubt you, Paul.'

She withdrew her eyes and sank into a chair. Upon her, too, as upon the girls, his influence was as a gas that one breathes and presently loses the consciousness of self. Besides, he was her Prophet, and she loved him like a son of whom his mother is proud. The desire of her life seemed to have come to her at last, after many failures and many disappointments. The reign of the Chicks, and the raps and the table turnings was gone; it was a bad dream. She no longer believed—Paul taught her not to believe—in their pretensions. She was Paul's disciple. She was

to him almost what Khadijah was to another Prophet. Never, surely, had there been Prophet younger, more comely, more winning, more worthy of motherly love.

‘Paul,’ she said, lifting her head, ‘you made me confess—against my will—a momentary weakness. Forgive me.’

‘Dear Lady, there is nothing to forgive. But to continue thus to doubt would be to estrange yourself from me. Could I stay in this house an hour longer if your affection were to cease?’

‘No, Paul. I am sure you could not.’

‘In the Ancient Way, you know that the woman rules through love—not the earthly but the spiritual love—in which there is not one man for one woman nor one woman for one man, but all for all and yet each for each.’

He pressed her hand.

‘When next you doubt me,’ he said, ‘ask yourself what I gain by staying here. If all my story were false why should I stay here? Sibyl does not like me. Tom does not believe

in me. My work in the study is harder than you think. What is my reward? I know not, unless it is your faith and your affection.'

'I cannot see Paul's eyes,' said Cicely, 'but I hear his voice. It is the only voice I have ever heard which could fill my soul with happiness. If that voice were false all the world would be false.'

'Strange things have happened in this house,' Paul went on, 'stranger things still will happen. Meantime, about this incident which I have called trifling.'

'No.' Lady Augusta betrayed herself, the incident was not by any means trifling in her eyes.

'In this matter my Friends will interfere. I can promise you the strangest thing possible, but in what follows have faith and do exactly what is ordered.'

'Oh! yes, yes, we will have faith.'

'I think it must be for your sake,' Paul said softly, 'not for that of Mr. Brudenel. Do not ask me any question; but have faith,'

he repeated solemnly, 'and do exactly what is ordered.'

'Yes, you may trust us, Paul. Only tell us what we are to do.'

He paused as if thinking what stupendous task should be imposed on them. They expected. What? Anything might be ordered. That women should be ordered to do anything was in itself strange and exciting. Knights are instantly ordered to do things—kill dragons, ride through enchanted lands—all kinds of things. But who ever heard of a middle-aged lady and a young lady being told to do things?

'Lady Augusta,' Paul said at length, 'go tell your husband to send immediately for—for his Bank Book.'

Her countenance fell. 'Is that all, Paul?'

'That is all. It is enough, is it not? A light task is laid upon you. But he will be angry and will use hard words about me and my—your—Friends. Bid him from me, in the name of Izák Ibn Menelek, to send instantly for his Bank Book.' It seemed a

small thing indeed after all the preamble. How could the Ancient Philosophy help by the medium of a Bank Book? But Lady Augusta obeyed.

‘Cicely,’ said Paul, laying his hand—as soft as her own—upon hers. ‘Cicely.’ His voice was sweet and musical. She raised her sightless face, which looked as if it belonged already to another world—that world where women are permitted to sing in the choir. ‘Cicely, whatever happens, never doubt that you shall be guarded from evil.’

‘Paul,’ she said, ‘you bring help and comfort to us all. Oh, how could we have lived all these years without you?’

CHAPTER IX.

THE MESSAGE OF THE BANK BOOK.

MR. BRUDENEL retired to his study. But this retreat, sacred to learning and meditation, was now transformed, in the manner peculiar to the operations of fate, into a Chamber or Cave of Despair, peopled by monstrous fiends who accused him of wasting and throwing away the property entrusted to his charge. For a man of honour and integrity to lose trust money, the fortunes of wards and children, is a very dreadful thing. By crippling himself and living in poverty he might, in course of years, replace the money. But he was now old; he would certainly reach the allotted term long before the money could be replaced. He would bequeath his lands, to make up the amount, for Tom and Cicely;

and then Sibyl would have nothing. And to think that the great and honourable and prosperous Company, which he himself founded and endowed with the magnificent business created by his father and christened with the name of his father, should break! Is it a light thing to hear one's name associated with failures and bankruptcy and the curses of thousands?

Sibyl came to console him by all the endearing acts and the soothing words at her command.

‘Go, child,’ he replied. ‘Go, Sibyl, and leave me alone. The family is disgraced. We can never hold up our heads again. I have lost the fortunes placed in my charge. I am a defaulter. Yours is lost, child, as well as Tom’s and Cicely’s. Leave me alone to face the disaster.’

Then Lady Augusta came to him, bringing, in token of peace, the Message concerning the Bank Book.

Mr. Brudenel scoffed at that Message; and indeed a Bank Book seems a futile thing

in itself with which to retrieve a loss of five-and-thirty thousand pounds. One might as well retrieve a lost battle by collecting the spent cartridges. Lady Augusta conjured him to obey in the name of the great and wise Izák Ibn Menelek. He derided that sacred name. She implored him for the sake of Paul, their guest, their guide, their friend, to obey. He blasphemed the name of Paul.

‘He shall go,’ cried Mr. Brudenel; ‘Paul shall go this very day. Since his Friends are unwilling or unable to avert disaster, let him go. I want not that kind of friendship any longer, Augusta; we have been tormented all our lives by the apathy, the ingratitude, and the mockery of those whom we have striven to help. What did Emanuel Chick’s spirits—or Lavinia’s either—ever do for us? Nothing. We have sacrificed our lives for them—we have tolerated all kinds of self-seeking people. They did nothing for us in return. What have Paul’s Friends done for us?’ In spite of his disappointments, Mr. Brudenel still believed fervently in the spirits

and their messages, as well as in the Seer of Abyssinia. ‘Tell him, Augusta, that I am bitterly disappointed in him. He had better pack up and leave us. I want to see him no more. His Friends must have known what was wrong. They can annihilate space, they can transport things and people two thousand miles in a moment. Yet they could not interpose to save these innocent children from losing their all. And he calls it a trifling matter! Tell him he may go, my dear. When he is gone we will have nothing more to do with the other world or with those in communion with it, or with those who have acquired powers over the spirits. I will sell my library—we will sell this house and go and live in some country cottage so as to save for the children some of their fortune back again. And we will go to Church, Augusta, like other folk, satisfied with what they know. That shall be enough for us, my dear. Tell Paul he may go this very day. As for sending for the Bank Book, I might as well take and draw a cheque for the whole five-and-thirty

thousand pounds. Go, my dear, and leave me alone, since I am deserted by those who ought to help; leave me to think, if I can, what may still be done.'

Lady Augusta withdrew in tears and reported this contumacy. And presently they all retired in various directions—Sibyl sat somewhere apart and the sound of the piano and her singing was not heard. Cicely went to her room where Hetty was waiting for her, but there was little reading done—mostly the two girls talked over what had happened, and Cicely considered the subject of Poverty as applied to herself, partly in the light of Hetty's experience, which was certainly wide and deep and also most discouraging, and partly from a speculative point of view, deducing its lessons and finding its Consolations, on which the girl who had never known its pains discoursed movingly in the manner of Paul to the other who had known those pains and pinches. As for Tom, he was consulting the family solicitors.

Paul himself was out. He went, in fact,

to spend the morning with his amiable friend in Beaumont Street, about whom, for his own reasons, he did not tell anybody.

On his return at one o'clock, he met Sibyl crossing the Hall.

‘Herr Paulus,’ she said, regarding him with the utmost severity, ‘I wish to tell you that nothing in the whole history of the Impostors who have been the curse of this house has ever inspired me with more disgust than your conduct this morning.’

Paul bowed gravely, putting his heels together in the foreign fashion. He was clad in his magnificent fur-lined great coat, and, with his hat in his hand, looked like some young foreign Prince or Potentate. But Sibyl regarded not his looks.

‘Had you really possessed those powers which you claim’—Paul raised his eyebrows slightly—‘you would have prevented this calamity. Otherwise you would deserve to be turned out of doors with ignominy for your treachery. That you have not done so proclaims aloud that you are an impostor.’

Sibyl was really astonished at her own freedom of speech, and went on encouraged : ‘Your affectation of superiority to money considerations also proves your trickery. It was overdone, sir. It was brutal. It was underbred.’ Paul reddened at the last word, which perhaps touched him in a tender place. ‘No gentleman could have behaved in that manner. I have always strongly suspected and disliked you ; now I despise you. That is all, Herr Paulus, that I have to say. Except,’ she added, ‘that I trust my father’s eyes may be opened by this incident, and that we shall very soon indeed bid you farewell.’

Again Paul bowed.

‘There is something written somewhere,’ he said, ‘about heaping coals of fire upon your enemy’s head. Perhaps——’ He bowed again, and, leaving the sentence unfinished, he went upstairs to his own room.

The luncheon, which had become since Paul’s arrival an animated and cheerful meal, enlivened with many a youthful jest and merry tale, began most gloomily. Only the

ladies were present, and they were all dejected. Sibyl, in addition, had great wrath, and was also perhaps a little ashamed of herself for her attack on Paul. He, however, preserved a cheerful air, and worked his way through the dishes with a steady appetite and continued display of that callousness which Sibyl called brutal and underbred.

On such occasions as that of a family calamity, the cook ought to make the table itself glow with sympathy. A bereavement requires cold meat; if it be a bereavement which brings a legacy or a succession, it should be cold chicken; if it possesses no such consolation, cold boiled mutton. Loving memory should be marked by the disappearance of the lighter and more festive dishes; there should be no *purée*, no fillet of sole, no cutlet *à la Soubise*, and no *ris de veau*; no jolly little birds, such as plover, snipe, partridges, pheasants, or blackcock. No *gelées*, aspics, omelettes, ices, creams, or pretty cakes. A sombre array of chops and steaks, plainly cooked, suggestive of solid

plebeian work-a-day comfort, cold boiled beef, tongue, with at most a half-pay pudding, should alone be served up. Perhaps the reason why Sibyl ate nothing at the meal was because this rule had not been carried out, and the table smiled and sparkled with artistic plenty and festive variety, as if nothing had happened. Had the cook no feelings? Yet all the household knew by this time that the fortunes had been lost.

‘Where is your father, dear?’ asked Lady Augusta, with a sigh.

‘He is still in his study. I do not think we shall see him at luncheon,’ said Sibyl with a profound sigh and a glance at Paul. ‘The Trifling Incident of this morning has been too much for him.’

Then Tom came in, cheerful, but with that cheerfulness which the brave young man preserves and exhibits on all occasions, say, after losing a boat race, or having his play damned, or after being beaten at the hundred yards, or after losing his first class, or on receiving his MS. from the Editor, or on

getting the sack; or after proving to himself how easily and swiftly and unexpectedly a fortune of fifteen thousand pounds may take wings and fly away without saying farewell, and be no more seen, leaving not a trace behind, nor anything to prove who has got it all. That is the most wonderful thing to understand; who does get all the money that is lost?

‘Well, good people,’ he said. ‘Let me have luncheon. One may be a pauper and yet get hungry. Paupers are always getting hungry, and it is a great nuisance for the ratepayers. Eating ought to be a luxury for the rich. Cicely, you and I are paupers. Yes, Sibyl,’ his voice dropped a little, because this meant so much more to her than to Cicely, ‘I have now got to work in earnest.’

‘That is, indeed, a great misfortune,’ Paul observed. ‘Your friends ought to go into mourning for you, Tom.’

‘My dear philosopher, you bear up so well and so nobly that I hope you will yourself shortly meet with a similar affliction. I

should rejoice to keep up my own pecker while you lost your money, and I would follow your example in not being depressed more than I could help with other people's misfortunes. I will take a cutlet. Well, I have been since breakfast to Lincoln's Inn Fields, where I have conversed, but without getting any comfort, with the Man of Law. I have been likewise into the city. So far as can be learned there is no chance of anything being saved. There is but one opinion. Total wreck. Cargo lost. Crew—that is the shareholders—cast away. Many are already, I hear, inquiring into the *menu* of the work-house dinner and whether the nature of the sleeping accommodation has been maligned, and if the uniform is becoming. The liabilities are anything you please, and the assets are as low as they make 'em. Beer for me. We shall be lucky, all of us, if we continue to get beer.'

'If everything is gone,' said Paul, with a sweet smile of patience, 'can we not agree to say no more about it? We talked about

nothing else at breakfast, and Mr. Brudenel actually lost his temper over it.'

'We can, Paul, and we will,' Tom replied. 'I am going to whistle fortune down the wind. I don't quite understand how to do it, but you shall show me. It is part of the Ancient Way, I am sure. If fortune is not kind to me, what care I how fair she be? You are quite right, Paul; it is best to talk about it no more.'

'More is lost than money, Tom,' said Sibyl, shaking her head solemnly and mournfully; 'the Family Name is disgraced. We can never look people in the face any more; we can never get over it; we can never go into society any more; we can never lift up our heads again; we can never, never recover from the dishonour of——'

At this point Mr. Brudenel himself appeared, and so transformed was he, so miraculously changed, that Sibyl could not in common decency finish the sentence, though she had been quoting her father word for word. If the family name had been really disgraced by the event of the morning he

must have found some wonderful soap capable of instantaneously removing any stains, because joy and satisfaction shone upon his face like the sun upon a field of golden grain. Yes—joy, satisfaction, content and happiness were all shown on that happy face, wreathed with smiles. He walked as if he wanted to break out into a dance; he spoke as if he wanted to laugh and sing.

‘Paul!’ he cried. ‘Forgive me! I ought never to have doubted. How could I doubt? Forgive me! I was hasty and of little faith. Oh! my dear friend, they have not forgotten me after all! They have not forgotten me! They remembered that whatever my own convictions might be as to the worthlessness of money—I had wards—and a daughter—and a daughter.’

He offered his hand, which Paul grasped with effusion.

‘There is nothing to forgive,’ he said. ‘I know what has happened. But you will tell us, will you not? Your doubts were natural. Tell everybody what has happened. You

have the Bank Book, I see.' It was in Mr. Brudenel's hand.

'It was only five minutes ago that it was brought to the door. Who sent for the Bank Book? Did you, Augusta?'

'Have you forgotten, my dear Cyrus,' she replied, somewhat coldly, 'what passed in the study when I suggested the sending for the Bank Book? It was not likely that I should take upon myself after that to send for the book.'

'Then it was you, Paul, was it?'

'Certainly not. But you can easily ask the clerk at the Bank who sent for it. Go on. You have got your Bank Book. Let us start with that.'

'Well, Augusta! Girls! Tom! We are saved after all! We are saved! That is what I have to tell you—we are saved!'

'This morning,' said Tom, 'we were lost. Are we the shuttlecocks of fortune? Perhaps to-morrow we shall be lost again. I beg your pardon, sir, for interrupting. How were we saved? Some swam ashore; some clung to—'

‘Well.’ Mr. Brudenel’s face showed bewilderment. It was always an expressive and a candid face, which revealed every emotion, and there was no doubt now that he felt the extremity of bewilderment. ‘By some extraordinary accident I had forgotten—clean forgotten—I cannot understand how I should have forgotten—but as a matter of fact—I—I—sold out—it seems—yes, I sold out all the shares in the Company standing to my name three weeks ago.’

‘Sold out?’ cried Tom. ‘Is it possible? How could you forget such a thing as that?’

‘I sold the shares. The bankruptcy of the Company, I rejoice to say, has passed over our heads like a harmless thunderstorm. It cannot hurt us in any way.’

‘But the disgrace to the family name,’ said Sibyl.

‘My dear——’ Mr. Brudenel hastened to impress a distinction of so much importance upon his daughter—‘a thing which seems disgraceful when it is coupled with such a loss of money loses its terror when there is no loss

of money. We have been separated so long from the direction of the Company that no stain, I now perceive, can attach to us.'

'And we are not paupers after all?' said Cicely. 'Then I know whom we have to thank.'

'No doubt,' said Sibyl. 'Herr Paulus will explain it all to us presently.'

'Why did you sell the shares?' asked Tom.

'I—I—I cannot remember.' Never anywhere had one seen more bewilderment in the face of human creatures. 'It is a most wonderful thing. I cannot remember anything at all about it.'

'Not remember making so great a change in your investments?'

'No; it is a most remarkable thing. I see that it is; I confess that it is. Yet I cannot remember why I sold the shares, or how I gave instructions, or anything at all about them. It is most remarkable.'

'It is, indeed,' said Tom, gravely. He remembered his guardian's complaint about

forgetting every day what passed in his excursions to and from Abyssinia. He didn't believe in those excursions, but he began to suspect some sort of softening. Only a man whose brain was going could forget such a thing as the transfer of thirty-five thousand pounds.

‘I did sell them, that is certain. And I have not yet invested the money in anything else,’ Mr. Brudenel went on. ‘It is all in my current account. Most wonderful. Paul, do you know anything? Can you throw any light? Can you help us to understand this?’

‘Ask me anything,’ Paul replied, ‘except about business. I know no more of shares and money than I know of Tom’s cog-wheels and springs.’

‘Here is the Bank Book with a note from the manager, which I found in the drawer of my table.’

Paul took both. On the left-hand side of the Bank Book was an entry,—

‘By sale of shares 35,456*l.* 13*s.* 6*d.*’

The manager's letter, dated on the same day as the entry in the book, was short.

‘Dear Sir,—In accordance with your instructions I have sold all your shares in Brudenel & Co. The stock was at $357\frac{1}{2}$. I have placed the amount realised, viz., 35,456*l.* 13*s.* 6*d.*, to your credit until further instructions.’ That was all.

‘You see,’ said Paul, ‘he says, “in accordance with your instructions.” To be sure, he could not sell them without your instructions. At least, I suppose not.’

‘And you do not remember giving those instructions?’ Tom asked. ‘To begin with, you must have had reasons for selling them.’

‘Well, Tom, I must have had reasons. I suppose I had reasons. What do you think my reasons were now? If anybody could remind me of those reasons I might remember.’

‘Somebody must have warned you—told you something—aroused your suspicions. In such a matter as the solvency of this Company—your own Company—it must have been something very serious indeed that

could make you resolve to take such a step as to sell out all your shares. You must have gone through a considerable period of doubt and hesitation—you must have argued with yourself—perhaps with someone else——’

‘Not with me,’ said Paul, on whom Tom’s eye rested first.

‘Nor with me,’ said Lady Augusta for the same reason.

‘You must, one would think, have passed days of consideration and doubt—you must have felt most anxious about the safety of the Company. The resolution must have caused you the greatest pain. And yet you forget—you forget.’

‘Of course,’ said Cicely, ‘Paul’s Friends helped. He asked them, this morning, to help and they did. They told us to send for the Bank Book.’

‘Unfortunately for that theory, Cicely,’ said Tom, ‘the transfer of the shares took place three weeks ago. Even Paul’s Friends, I presume, without wishing in any way to

limit their powers, cannot actually put Time back for three weeks. To annihilate space is one thing. To bring back and alter the past is another.'

'Perhaps,' said Mr. Brudenel, 'my daily visits to Abyssinia absorbed my attention altogether and made me forget everything.'

'Possibly,' Tom replied. 'If I went to Abyssinia and back every day, I should think the journey would account for everything.'

'It is most wonderful,' Mr. Brudenel said, for the tenth time.

'If I might offer a suggestion,' said Paul gently, 'it would be this : On the 23rd of this month, Mr. Brudenel's guardianship ceases. He may have intended to hand to each of his wards their portion entire, to be re-invested as they might think best, and, therefore, he sold out without any doubts at all in his mind as to the solidity of the Company. He had invested theirs to the best advantage ; he would now in surrendering his trust give them not an investment, but the whole portion in a cheque.'

‘That was it—that was it!’ cried Mr. Brudenel, eagerly jumping at the suggestion. ‘I remember now. That was the reason why I sold out. That was my intention. That was in my mind. That accounts for it. In fact, I remember everything now. You see, Tom, don’t you—why I sold out? Thank you, Paul. You always come to our help in everything.’

‘But,’ said Tom, who had now looked at the other side of the Bank Book, ‘there is something else here. How do you account for paying away the whole of the money a week after to other people?’

‘What paying away? To other people?’

‘In three cheques.’ Tom read the following entries: ‘To Izák Ibn Menelek, 20,000*l.*; to Rupert P. Zeigler, 10,000*l.*; to Surabjee Kamsitjee, 5,000*l.*’

‘What?’ This was more unexpected even than the entry on the left-hand side.

‘Look for yourself. Do you remember those cheques?’

Mr. Brudenel read the entries. Yes; the

whole of the money so wonderfully rescued from the falling Company had been paid away in those three cheques.

He looked about him helplessly. 'What does it mean?' he asked. 'I remember nothing at all,' he said. 'Nothing at all about any of these cheques.'

Then all with one consent turned to Paul. Even Thomas the Doubter and Sibyl the Infidel turned to Paul for explanations.

'Come,' said Tom. 'The first of these gentlemen, Mr. Izák Ibn Menelek, the illustrious Sage of Abyssinia, who gets a cheque for 20,000*l.*, is, I believe, a personal friend of yours, Paul. The least you can do for us in the matter is to ask him for an explanation how and why he got the money.'

'Certainly, I will ask him to explain the whole business. But they are all three friends of mine. I will ask them all.'

'Put it to the Wise Man,' said Tom, 'from a modern point of view. Let him understand that money is in these days only paid to people in return for services rendered or

promised : explain to him what getting money under false pretences means : perhaps he is only posted in the Ancient Law and the Hidden Way. Tell him how awkward things are made nowadays for people who persuade other people out of their money.'

'I will ask them all why they took the money. But perhaps they will not tell me.'

'That is very likely,' said Sibyl.

'Perhaps we may make them. Let us understand each other, Paul. It is Sibyl's money and Cicely's and mine that is concerned. I want no fooling around in this matter.'

'My Friends never fool around. If they will not tell me I cannot make them. And, frankly, I believe they will not tell me.'

'I shall hold you responsible for this money,' said Tom.

'If you please. Let me, however, point out to you that you will find it difficult to connect me with the cheques. One of them has been presented by a friend of mine now in Abyssinia ; another by a friend in Philadelphia ; and the third by a friend now in

Bombay. That is all I can tell you. Why the cheques were drawn by Mr. Brudenel, for what consideration, or the thought of what promise—I cannot tell you. Ask Mr. Brudenel.’

Very good. ‘This was reasonable. Mr. Brudenel had not connected Paul with the cheques; he remembered nothing at all about them.

‘Let us,’ said Tom, ‘see the cheques.’

They were in the pocket of the Bank Book. They were drawn in Mr. Brudenel’s own handwriting—firm, clear, straight up and down—a handwriting which was difficult to imitate. There could be no doubt at all that they were all drawn and signed by himself. They were made payable to order and were crossed. They were also endorsed. They were therefore paid into some bank, not across the counter. Tom replaced the cheques in the pocket and put book and all into his own pocket, saying nothing.

‘Am I,’ said Mr. Brudenel, dropping into

a chair, 'the sport of the Spirits? Is it their revenge upon me for deserting their Cause?'

'Oh!' Cicely clasped her hands. 'Why do we make such a fuss? Why do we doubt? Why do we fear? Paul told us that we must send for the Bank Book. Only let us have a little faith!'

But Tom laid his hand upon the breast pocket of his coat in which lay the Bank Book and the cheques. And he tapped that pocket as much as to intimate that Faith, even when taken in large quantities, would not render Enquiry unnecessary.

CHAPTER X.

THE FIRST INVESTIGATION.

It was the morning after.

On the morning after a storm, as everybody knows who has been wrecked at sea, the sun always breaks gloriously, the sky is clear, the air is soft and balmy, though the sea may heave and be still unquiet.

The shares were sold. That was the first thing. It was like escaping in an open boat from a sinking ship. But all the money was mysteriously conveyed away into the hands of three unknown persons, one of them certainly the Instructor, but hitherto the unseen Instructor, of Mr. Brudenel, and all three stated by Paul to be his own personal friends. This was like the dangerous heaving of the boat. No one knew what might happen with those uncertain factors in the

problem. That was like having no port within a thousand miles, yet to be lying in the track of vessels.

After breakfast, Sibyl followed Tom to his workshop.

‘No one comes here, Dodo,’ he said ; ‘we can talk as much as we please, undisturbed. My dear Dodo, what shall we do if the money is all gone?’

‘You will make yourself a great name, Tom ; and I will wait—oh ! and perhaps you will get tired of waiting.’

‘My dearest Dodo, if you look so sweet I shall get tired of waiting immediately.’

These are the marks which show that what followed is irrelevant and beneath the dignity of the historian. They are also symbols which silly lovers in the humbler walks, where they are less eloquent in words than the better educated, use as tokens to show the depth and intensity of their passion, their fidelity, and their constancy. Like all symbols they fall very far short of the reality.

‘And now, Tom, let us talk soberly. You said you had “quantities of things to tell me.”’

‘Quantities, Dodo? None of them half so important as the things I have just told you; as that I lo——’

‘No, Tom; not again. Let us proceed to business.’

‘Well, then, if one must. We are persuaded, are we not, that this fellow Paul—I wish I didn’t like the beast—is at the bottom of the whole business?’

‘Perfectly certain.’

‘For some purpose of his own we are assured that he has devised the whole thing—how, we are not yet certain.’

‘We are agreed so far, Tom. I am also perfectly certain that he means to carry off the whole of this money.’

‘There we differ. I am convinced that his was the hand that executed, and his the head that planned, the whole plot. But I am not so sure that he means to stick to this money. It would be a *coup* too audacious even for a

man who sends another to Abyssinia and back, all in a single morning.'

'Then what does he do it for?'

'I don't quite know. I've watched Paul ever since he came here, and I've talked with him nearly every night in this room, Dodo. I like him, and I believe in him. That is, I believe that he has not come here after money.'

'My dear Tom, they all come after money.'

'He knows that I am watching him and trying to find out how he does it. We always talk on that assumption. It is understood.'

'Who is this man, Tom, that he should be different from the Emanuel Chicks and the rest of them?'

'He is an American. Of that I have not the least doubt. Not that such a fact lifts him necessarily above old Chick. By no means. Do you know, however, that there is a certain kind of American who craves for notoriety above all things? There are plenty over here who would give a good deal for notoriety, but with this American kind it is a

craze. Paul is one of them. He has betrayed himself to me a hundred times. He cannot bear the thought of being one of the common herd, to live unnoticed and to be forgotten as soon as he is dead. He wants distinction.'

'Oh! what distinction! One of the tribe of impostors who pretend to supernatural powers.'

'Perhaps nature did not give him the qualities which go to make a man successful on the ordinary lines. But then, on the other hand, she gave him more than his share of nervous quickness, so that he sees at once while ordinary people are only feeling their way.'

'Well?'

'Then—I have been reading up the subject lately. I used to laugh at it. There is the power called mesmerism, about which so much nonsense has been written. It is a real power, though so little under control that physicians refuse to use it. Paul has that power, and he has developed it. You

saw, Sibyl, how he acted upon Cicely and Hetty.'

'Yes. He mesmerised them.'

'He made them think as he pleased, and he made them see what he willed. It is an uncommon phase of this force, but there are instances of it.'

'Well, Tom? But all this does not remove him from the tribe of impostors. How about Prince Menelek and the Abyssinian Sage?'

'They belong to the patter of the profession. Did you ever hear a conjuror talk while he does his tricks? The faster he talks, the more he diverts your attention, the more astonishing are the things he does.'

'But the papers from India.'

'They are also part of the patter. The great trick in this case is, I am persuaded, the exercise of mesmeric influence.'

'Oh!'

'You see that an immense reputation may be established by the performing of miracles. Paul aims at the reputation of supernatural powers. Hence his miracles. The blind girl

sees her brother; the photograph of the brother floats down from the ceiling; the paper comes all the way from India.'

'And all this money takes wings and flies away, Tom.'

'You persist in believing the man to be dishonest, Sibyl. Let me go on. Paul is locked up every morning with your father. Every day he spends an hour with Lady Augusta. Most days, I have ascertained, he has an hour or so as well in Cicely's room. He has acquired influence almost absolute over your father, and over the two girls, while Lady Augusta firmly believes in him. But he does not move her to the same extent as the others.'

'I suppose that is so.'

'We hear of daily visits to Abyssinia. But mark! Your father forgets every day what he has said and done there. Cicely sees her brother as often as she wishes, by Paul's help. Hetty obeys if he lifts his little finger. This is a dangerous state of things, Sibyl. In the hands of an unscrupulous person it would

be very dangerous. The man has opportunities which no one should be allowed to have.'

'Yes, and how has he used them?'

'He has taken all our money, Sibyl. Of that I am certain. And yet I do not believe he has stolen it.'

'I do, Tom.'

'Now, I have made one discovery which may help us. I have found out that he knew, a month ago, that Brudenel and Company were shaky.'

'Oh! and he pretends to know nothing at all about business.'

'We must be tolerant, my dear. When a man goes in for this line of life he must be prepared with a good many Crackers and a Brazen Brow. He is like a novelist.'

'Everybody knows that a novelist makes up.'

'Yes, but if you stop to think that it is made up, you are lost. Now listen, I have found out one of the Crackers, which is something. Four weeks ago Lavinia Medlock had

a visit from an old gentleman, all of whose money was in the Company. He had received a private and confidential warning from somebody who had access to the books or could put things together. He had also received an assurance from somebody else in the office that the Company was most flourishing. Then this old gentleman, bewildered and uncertain, went to Lavinia for counsel. He might as well have asked the town pump. Lavinia's spirits behaved in the usual ridiculous manner, and she finally gave it up and made out a case for counsel and sent it to Paul, who ordered the old gentleman to sell out instantly.'

'But how did he know the private affairs of the firm?'

'My dear child, I told you that Paul possesses extraordinary faculties. He found out, I suppose, just as I have found out, only much more quickly, that in the present condition of trade, and considering what the Company have done of late years, the concern could not possibly keep up the high

dividends which it has been paying. If I had given my attention, six months ago, to the subject, I would have convinced your father as well as myself. Very good, that is my discovery. As for the letter of introduction to the manager, it was written—I have seen it—by your father. Nothing could be clearer. The cheques were also signed by him. Moreover, the three persons to whom the cheques were payable—the Right Honourable Izák Ibn Menelek the Falasha, Mr.—probably General—Rupert P. Zeigler, of Philadelphia, and the respectable Surabjee Kamsitjee, of Bombay, have all opened accounts in their different banks, each giving the name of your father as a reference of respectability. In each case he has written a letter attesting the respectability of the person. No hesitation was made in opening an account which began with so big a cheque and so sound a reference.’

‘All this is very wonderful, Tom. But it does not prove the man’s honesty.’

‘It does not, I confess. But so far, not a

single cheque has been drawn at any of the banks. I have found that out, and it seems to me a very significant circumstance. Well. One more discovery I also made. The cheques were paid in personally. The first was brought by an old man infirm and crippled, who could scarcely walk—Paul himself, no doubt. The second was brought by a middle-aged man with an immense light brown beard and spectacles—Paul again. The third was brought by a man in Eastern costume, brown-skinned, with a thick black beard and black eyes. I have Paul's photograph painted and adorned with a turban and a black beard—here it is—the true portrait of Surabjee Kamsitjee—only, unfortunately, they do not remember at the Bank.'

Tom continued summing up the situation.

'Well. The position is sufficiently alarming. How could we prove that Paul caused these cheques to be drawn by false pretences? Mesmeric influence is not recognised by the Courts of Law, though undue influence might be urged. You have to prove it. A man

apparently in the full vigour of his intellect orders, in an autograph letter which cannot be disputed, the sale of certain shares. He then with his own hand draws these cheques—the counterfoils being entered with care—and signs them. The signature cannot be disputed. He then writes three letters, in each of which he vouches for the respectability of a certain person. His only answer to these facts is that he forgets all about it; that he does not know these persons. But he cannot tell how he came to do it. Next, how are we to connect Paul with the money? How can it be proved that he was the infirm old man? I confess that it will be difficult.

‘As for Mr. Rupert Zeigler, the beard is all one has to go by, although I am perfectly sure that the beard was on Paul’s chin. And as for the gentleman of Bombay, they remember very little about him, though they own that my picture seems very like. So far, you see, I think the most acute detective would fail to connect Paul with the cheques. It remains to find out, if we can, his method of

working upon your father, and on that point I hope to be able to throw light before long.'

'And meantime, I suppose,' said Sibyl, 'he will make my father sell his land and his house and everything.'

'It is possible. In such hands anything is possible.'

'And yet you are not alarmed.'

'Not a bit. I have no fear. Paul is only working up another miracle. He is arranging his effects, and getting together his little properties. It will be, he thinks, a truly beautiful miracle: only, this time, perhaps, we may have the satisfaction of knowing how he does it. And, perhaps, Dodo,' he took her hand again. 'Perhaps the discovery, if we do make it, may act as an eye-opener to your father, and the Vestal Virgin of the Cause may be allowed to leave the Temple of a fallen god.'

CHAPTER XI.

ONLY A KISS.

THERE was one room in the house into which we have not yet penetrated—a small room on the first floor, which for beauty, comfort, and daintiness, excelled all the other rooms in the house. It was so beautiful and so dainty, because it had been the girls' room formerly so called, but was now Cicely's room. When school came to an end and the last of the governesses departed, Sibyl left the room, but Cicely remained. Everything belonged to the blind girl; the books, which Hetty read to her, the pictures, also read to her by Hetty; the pretty things which she could not see; yet it is undoubtedly good for a blind girl to be surrounded by things beautiful. The music was hers which Hetty played to

her, the piano was hers on which she herself played, letting her fingers wander over the keys, while to her sightless eyes there came visions. What visions? What do they see, the blind? How do they shape and colour the world? What is form, what is colour to the blind? How do they imagine the tender green of the young leaves in June; the fragility of the flowers; the thousand hues of nature; the charms of beauty; the magic of the eyes; the witchery of art; the slopes and shadows of the hills; what are they like—the visions and the fancies of the blind? I know not. Cicely's visions came to her, bringing happiness unspeakable, sometimes when she heard sweet music, sometimes when she heard great poetry, sometimes when she listened to the voice of a certain young man, who spoke as she had never before heard any man speak.

He came often to this room; he came nearly every day; generally he came in the afternoon, between tea and the first dinner bell; a quiet and lazy time when the lamp was lit, the curtains drawn, and the cold east

wind shut out. There was no concealment about his visits; he went openly to the room; anybody who wanted him at this time would look for him in Cicely's room. The whole house was his. If you had asked him why he came here he would have replied, with as much candour as you have any right to expect—it is not possible, unhappily, for any man to be wholly candid—that he loved above all things (except, perhaps, Distinction) material comfort, physical ease, warmth, and the contemplation of things beautiful. Like many other preachers and philosophers, while he despised riches, he ardently loved those things which only riches can procure. Indeed, it is too often forgotten, especially by parents, guardians, tutors, and teachers, how much more intense is the craving for these things in first manhood, when these things are the least attainable, than in age. In the early twenties a young man yearns and craves for physical ease and for love and for beauty; he grows sick for lack of these; life is worthless because he cannot get them. By the time he

gets to fifty he has had much experience of little ease, hard work and cold weather ; and, besides, has had some moderate share of happiness and of love, insomuch that the old yearning, like a fierce fire that has burned itself out, only smoulders ; and as for things beautiful, they are intimately connected with persons beautiful : and, therefore, it is no use yearning after what belongs to the young. Now, alas—

Love will not lip him ;
Maid will not clip him ;
Maud and Marian pass him by.

If further pressed, Paul would have gone on to confess—but he had a most wholesome Protestant hatred of the Confessional—that he could get warmth and easy chairs in other parts of the house, even in his own room, by himself, or in Tom's room, but he could get nowhere else the undivided companionship of two beautiful girls, sweet, confiding, and believing. Every Prophet, even a False Prophet, loves to have disciples who never question.

Hither he came and here he talked of things, the contemplation of which lifts the

soul which submits to be lifted and to be guided. Men are too stiff-necked to submit. I have never seen in any club smoking-room either a Prophet who wanted to lift other men's souls, or men who submitted their souls to be lifted. A shove up—as Baxter poetically put it—is the last thing which men ask of each other. But how many women are always looking for it! Paul spoke of life and death, of the barrier which lies between, of the eternal world of which this life is but a tiny episode as the soul marches upwards or downwards. Was it nonsense that he talked? I know not. His soft and musical voice, his dark and beautiful eyes, his presence and his comeliness made it more than sense—divine wisdom, so that the hearts of the two girls glowed.

‘There is not,’ his words flowed musically, ‘anything in this world that man can make or desire or aim at which is really of the smallest importance. Love? He may wait for it, because beyond the Barrier—as we say, but there is no Barrier—love awaits him far

deeper and more holy than any earthly love. Wealth? It can do nothing for the soul. Knowledge? They do not understand—they can never understand—that the secrets of nature which they so painfully seek and so slowly acquire, are all revealed in the wisdom we call the Hidden Way. Long life? It is only to be desired while those we love are still unable to see and converse with the spirits. When all can see as I can see, and converse as I can converse, we shall die without a pang or a regret. Cicely—Hetty’—he lowered his voice, ‘there are some things which one cannot speak of before the world; in this room, with you, we may speak freely, for we believe. Oh! we are always, everywhere, surrounded by spirits. I see them,’ he looked around, ‘they are in this room now, they are speaking together of you. They pass and are gone, and others follow. Some stay with us always to whisper words which may warn and advise: they protect us from evils—real evils: they laugh when we complain of imaginary evils and of wrongs which

cannot harm the soul; they fill us with lofty thoughts—you might see them if you had my eyes. Yet a little while and you shall see them—yes, you shall see them, Cicely, you as clearly as Hetty. I cannot give you the power of seeing things earthly, but things spiritual you shall see clearly as I myself.’

To read these things is foolishness; to hear them spoken in a soft and musical voice, in the accents of truth and conviction, by one who had shown that he could do things which to other men are impossible, in the seclusion of that room, was to these girls nothing short of a new Gospel—all their own—all to themselves. Think of a new Gospel all to yourself! And while the young man gave the girls these glimpses into the Unknown, his eyes wandered from Cicely, listening like some sweet cloistered saint to Francis of Assisi, her blind eyes looking heavenwards, with parted lips and glowing cheeks, to Hetty, who lifted her heavy lustrous eyes not to heaven but to the prophet, moved less by the delights of eternal study—as some are moved less by

those of eternal singing—than by the joys of companionship with those one loves.

Sometimes he read poetry to them—the poetry which fills the soul with vague yearnings; and he would leave the verses half finished, and in talk carry on the theme, playing on their emotions as a musician produces variations of the same air. Sometimes he would tell them stories taken from I know not where, but his memory was good and his imagination strong; they were stories such as are not written down—no editor would receive them—they had no plot, and they were not constructed with any art; they ran on, and their interest lay in the manner of telling; and sometimes, like an imaginative child, he would carry on the story from day to day. Generally the hero was a poor lad of obscure origin, who worked his way to great fame and distinction by courage and by genius.

Sometimes he would tell them of places which he had seen and people he had met. He knew New York and Boston; he knew

Florence, Rome, and Venice, Paris, and St. Petersburg; he could tell them all kinds of strange and curious things. A young man who has travelled so far has seen many things, high and low. And remember, this young man told the girls nothing that was low and common. He did not abuse his position. Always he raised their souls and lifted them above themselves. Always, at his coming, Hetty put on, mentally, her Sunday frock, and Cicely attuned her mind to higher things.

A prudent young man, especially one who has been solemnly warned of the dangers which belong to the society of young ladies and knows beforehand that Love is fatal to the Higher Philosophy, would have kept out of this room, set with the only trap which Cupid ever lays—a lovely girl or two—and would have attended strictly to business. Every young man's future, but especially Paul's, depends upon his sticking to business. Yet it is difficult when one is young to be always thinking of the Future. The Present, you see, is ever with us; the Future, child of

the Present, seems so far off. And then the Present is for ever changing, which prevents monotony, though it causes us to call it names, such as fugacious, illusory, a cheat, a false promiser, and the like. And even if the Present be a Fool's Paradise, that kind of garden is very delightful and wholly free from anxiety and forethought. Why, it is not everybody who can find out the flowery lane that leads to that garden gate; and when it is found there are very few who have a key that will open it.

One afternoon—a day or two after the Failure of Brudenel and Company—Hetty was sitting alone in their room reading a story. The book was all about the happiness which love brings to those girls who are so lucky as to win a lover, young, rich, handsome, well born, and clever. I think the hero in this story was a Guardsman—nothing less, if you please—of noble family, of course; great wealth, naturally; and the poetic temperament for which the Guards' Club—and Skindle's—is so remarkable; he was two-and-

twenty and she was eighteen—it is an age too young for real and solid love, only most novelists and poets do not perceive this great truth—nor do the boys and girls who read them. It was a most beautiful story, in short, ending happily with rice but no wedding breakfast. Somehow, Hetty did not much care for it. Her thoughts wandered.

Suddenly, without any footstep being heard, the door opened and Paul appeared. That was nothing unusual. But Hetty for some reason blushed a rosy red.

He came in softly—not secretly—shutting the door behind him. He went to the window and looked out. It was six o'clock, in the middle of April. A grey sky covered the garden, where the east wind ground together black branches of the trees; there was not yet a touch of spring upon the boughs or on the flower beds. Paul shivered and half drew the curtain to keep out the sight of the cold. Then he took Cicely's chair beside the fire and sat down and looked at Hetty. She laid down her book and waited.

‘Where is Cicely?’ he asked.

‘She is lying down. She has a little headache.’

‘Bring her here and I will send it away.’ This young man had a surprising power of sending away toothache, headache, earache, neuralgia, and all—or perhaps nearly all—the aches and pains which afflict humanity. He cured the servants and the servants’ friends. His remedy was the application of his hand, which immediately caused the pain to vanish. In the same way I have seen a negro cause a sprain to disappear instantly. The human hand, accompanied by a certain amount of energy on the one side and faith on the other, does it. Perhaps the toothache came again after a while, and in the end they had to go to the dentist and have the horrid thing clawed out—but think of the relief for the time!

Hetty rose to obey.

‘No — no,’ said Paul. ‘Let her stay. Lying down will do her good. And we will talk, Hetty.’

She sat down again and waited, submissive.

He rose and stood over her.

‘Look in my eyes,’ he said.

‘Oh! Paul—no—no—spare me.’

‘I will do you no harm, child.’

‘You make me faint and dizzy. When I grow unconscious, you will make me tell you what you please. You will do with me as you did with the butler when you made him tell us how he drinks the wine. Spare me, Paul.’

He laughed and sat down.

‘We will talk, then. Are you happier, Hetty?’

‘Yes.’

‘Are you happier because I am here?’

‘You know I am, Paul. You make us all happier—you have brought such happiness into this house as was never known before. Even Sibyl says that you have brightened the place.’

‘Are you happier because you see a little more clearly than before?’

‘I did not desire to see more clearly. Yet it does make me happier to feel that things are not all a pretence. Oh, Paul, it is a dreadful thing to feel ashamed of your mother. I know the things that are done. I have had to keep my eyes closed. In this house I have had to preserve silence even when I knew there was imposture and I could have exposed the cheat—but then I should have had to tell how I knew the tricks. And at last to feel that there is really truth in it in spite of all—to know that my mother really does converse with the spirits even if they are only the lower kind. It has made me inexpressibly happy, Paul, to be certain of this.’

‘I am glad, Hetty,’ he replied. ‘It is no small thing to make you happy, Hetty.’

‘Besides, you have made Cicely happy. She has no knowledge of unworthy tricks. But you have made her happier and more cheerful. And you have made the whole house cheerful. Formerly it was as gloomy, especially after another Disappointment, as a sepulchre.’

‘Hetty,’ Paul abruptly changed the subject. ‘You are young—you will not always remain with Cicely. What will you do with your life?’

‘I do not know. I have not had the disposing of my own life so far. I do not suppose that will ever be given into my hands.’

‘Do you look forward? Do you think what may be in the lap of Fortune for you?’

‘Sometimes. But I dare not think too much upon the future.’

‘Look forward now, Hetty. Nay,’ he repeated imperiously, ‘I command you. Look forward and tell me truthfully what you see. Remember it is not the real future that you will see: it is the future that you least desire and most dread.’

The girl closed her eyes. Then she shuddered and trembled and opened them again.

‘I cannot, Paul.’

‘Tell me,’ he said. ‘You must.’

She resisted no longer.

‘I see a long life of poverty. I am always somebody’s companion. There will never be

any one so kind as Cicely. I get older and poorer, and I am always solitary. It is a dreadful life, Paul,' she cried. 'I see the end of it. I *will* not look any more.'

'There is another picture,' said Paul. 'Look again, Hetty. See what I see.'

'Oh! I see a girl, it is myself; and a man before her, and he leads her away by the hand; and oh! she is full of happiness.'

'Do you see the face of the man?'

'No, I cannot see it. But I know the shape of his head. It is—oh!' she covered her face with her hands, and said no more.

'Play to me, Hetty,' said Paul, springing to his feet. 'Play me music—quickly—play to me.'

She obeyed; her cheek blushing and her eyes down dropped, and began to play such music as she played to Cicely when the blind girl wanted to dream and have the visions which music brought.

Paul walked restlessly about the room. So in far off America a certain lad named

Ziphion walked to and fro, while a certain girl named Bethiah played to him.

‘Hetty!’ he cried.

She stopped and turned her head.

‘Your music does not soothe me. It maddens me. Oh! stand up and take my hands. Hetty, Hetty. Look in my eyes again. Do they subdue you? Do they compel you? Do they make your brain reel and your eyes move? Do they, child, make you afraid, now?’

‘Oh! no, no.’

‘Because they are subdued by yours, Hetty. Because they are conquered.’ He drew her gently, and his arms lay round her neck and waist, and he kissed her a dozen times. Then, without another word, he pushed her roughly from him, and rushed out of the room, banging the door behind him.

CHAPTER XII.

SIR PERCIVAL.

‘YES,’ said the clerk in the Secretary’s office. ‘The man is here. You will find him within. He arrived in the “Willing Bride,” of Quebec, three months out, and he’s madder than ever. Three prayer meetings he’s held already, and he’s at it again. I wonder how they stand it so well. You can go in if you want.’

The place was in the Sailors’ Home, Dock Street. Paul passed through a short passage and found himself in a large, low room, set with solid square timber pillars, to shore up the roof; tables of a heavy and solid kind were set about, and benches stood beside them. It was the common room of the Sailors’ Home, where they take their meals

and sit and converse. If you go through the common room you find yourself in a place which reminds you of a ship and of a monastery, and of those solitaries who lived in caves, high up in the sides of cliffs and precipices, and you turn dizzy and reel. For there are rows of little cells or cabins, in every one a sailor, piled one above the other, and, in front of each row, a gallery in light iron, with iron staircases, the sight of which makes you think of falling over or through.

The common room, this morning, was thinly attended. A lusty negro, coal black, rolled about, and, on one of the benches, pipe in mouth, two or three mild-faced Norwegians sat with the newspaper of their native country in their hands; a dozen fellows lounged and leaned against the pillars with crossed legs, doing nothing with the contentment only possible with sailors and fishermen; one or two men were writing, one or two smoking pipes; there was a smell as of 'tween decks, one thought of the fo'k'sle; tar was present, and one thought of ropes; if the men had lurched

and pitched as they went one would not have been surprised.

In the middle of this room, however, surrounded by a little group of sailors, chiefly young, was a young man sitting in a chair—talking and arguing. In reality he was preaching, but it seemed as if he was merely talking earnestly from his chair, while they gathered round and listened. But from time to time he sprang to his feet and raised his voice, and addressed them in impassioned tones, which were surely those of the preacher. And he used a certain gesture which has of late become fashionable among orators of the fervid type. I think it is an American importation, made, like all American things, for the purpose of impressing Demos. For my own part I prefer the old English gestures used for impressing persons who possess the critical faculty, just as I prefer English cheeses, English bacon, English apples to the American importations. This gesture consists in throwing the right arm up and back, and then hurling the hand, so to speak, at the

audience. It is easily learned, and may be acquired by half-an-hour's practice before a glass ; when a man is really and truly in earnest, and possesses the gift of impassioned speech, it helps him to become effective ; when a man only wishes to seem in earnest, and therefore shows the pretence in his words, the gesture is grotesque, and destroys what effect his oratory might otherwise produce. Demos is no fool ; above all, he is ready to detect a man who is not really in earnest. That is the reason why so many leaders disappear early, and why so much vigorous speech is thrown away and wasted.

Paul drew near and sat down to listen.

The speaker was dressed as a common sailor ; his face was weather-beaten, but the features were regular ; his hands were tarry, but they were small ; his figure was tall and graceful ; his short hair was dark ; he spoke like a gentleman, and he looked above the rank of a common sailor. His eyes were remarkable for their bright and even fiery appearance ; in the low dark room they glowed.

They were the eyes of a fanatic or a madman. Once I saw crouching in a corner of a darkened cell a madman who had killed a warder. He was perfectly quiet, but his eyes were two balls of fire, and he was ready to spring upon the first man who should venture within the cell. Such were the eyes of this young sailor.

It was apparent immediately from his words that he belonged to the narrowest order of Christians. We who live in great towns and choose our own religion, and sometimes choose a broader form of Christianity, permit ourselves to deride the narrow brethren. We should not deride them. They belong to a very big school indeed. There are ten millions of them in England, four millions in Scotland, two in Ireland, three in Colonial Britain, and thirty millions in America who belong to this school. It is not, therefore, by any means extinct. Nor will it ever become extinct so long as men who are unlearned claim to exercise the right of private interpretation. And it will always be a narrow

school, although its disciples hold all kinds of conclusions and divide themselves into as many sects as there are sauces in France. The arguments of this school are based upon premises which the wicked Rationalist will not allow ; its followers know nothing of the Science of Religion or of the development of the great central idea ; the school is as cruel and pitiless as the Letter of the Law ; it is self-sufficient and arrogant. We may say all kinds of harsh things as regards this school, but those who remember how terrible a tyranny is Authority, how truly hateful a thing is Ecclesiastical Rule, and how monstrous a being is the Priest in Power, will take heart though a dozen new sects are invented every day, and will continue to praise the Lord that such thinkers are enabled to exist at all.

Paul had been brought up in this school himself. He knew all the tags and the phrases of the school ; if he was ever to get religion, it would be this sort of religion. But it was a long time since he had concerned himself about the condition of his soul. For

many reasons such an inquiry would have been undesirable and unsettling. Besides, was he not in the hands of Friends who know all about the next world?

As Paul sat and listened—the man who was speaking was a born orator—his mind went back to a certain plain building, white-washed inside, where the people sat in narrow pews while a man in a black coat thundered and pleaded, threatened, coaxed, and promised, and threatened again. He remembered how that man looked and how his voice resounded in the building. Some of the congregation had already experienced religion; these groaned, sighed, and murmured; others were looking for it with anxious hearts; others only looked on with apathetic faces as if the thing did not concern them in the least. He remembered how they all looked, and how he from his seat in the gallery used to gaze into the faces below and read their thoughts. As this sailor went on, Paul's eyes closed; he was again a boy listening to an address for the unconverted—it was delivered so often,

and it converted so few. The arguments were the same ; his memory took him back to the child who believed and wondered why religion was so long in coming to him, though Bethiah was already converted and was a Church member. Then an unexpected phrase brought him back to the Sailors' Home. Why, this man was a preacher indeed. Had the pulpit been occupied by him in the old days Paul must have been converted long ago. He would have become, in fact, a Church member. He would then have stayed in his native town. He would have risen to the proud position of Superintendent of the Sunday School and Deacon. Or he might have gone to College and become a Minister and preached those same things himself. Then he would have married Bethiah ! Where was Bethiah ? And then he would have never seen Hetty ! Now, his conversion was impossible. It would interfere too much with his prospects. He had, in fact, other engagements. Paul sighed and returned to business.

The speaker went on. He chained his audience. He forced them to listen. He told them that he had converted every hand aboard the 'Willing Bride,' insomuch that when the men were paid off not one of them was found to go into a public house nor would a single one venture in Ratcliffe Highway, although we now call it by another name. And he said he was going to convert them too, and that right off and without any delay. At the prospect of immediate conversion some of those honest fellows looked blank, remembering what would follow—the renunciation, namely, of all those practices in which they had been accustomed to find their only joy. Not one or two, mind you, because the Church of this Gospeller is a very strict Church indeed, and allows no indulgences at all. No more drink, neither beer nor rum. No more happy gatherings with pipe and pewter in snug back rooms. No more jovial evenings with grog and song and Polly of Poplar and Rosy of Ratcliffe. Poor Polly and Rosy! Whither would they go? What would

they do? No more fights; no more dances; no more anything. Oh! my countrymen, what a blank was left! Others again looked as if they were fit to sit upon the stool of repentance. And others, just as it used to be in the chapel, looked as if salvation belonged to the others and had nothing to do with themselves. The preacher stopped at last, with such a picture of the next world as made one poor lad burst into a blubber while another trembled and shook. Then he sang a hymn—his voice was strong as well as musical—and then he began to go round and to talk to each man in turn, of those who would listen. Most of them, however, broke away from the circle, which is always the way, and only what every preacher expects.

He knelt beside the boy who wept and prayed for him. He knelt beside the boy who trembled and prayed for him. He knelt in the middle of the room and prayed aloud for all, and then, his service over, he stood and looked around him with anxious eyes, as

if he was still an unprofitable labourer and had neglected much.

At this juncture Paul approached him.

‘I have a message for you,’ he said. ‘Have you finished your prayers and preaching?’

‘Who are you?’ the sailor replied. ‘If you come on what the world calls business you need not deliver that message. Do not speak to me about money—bestow the money where you please.’

‘You do not know me. It is no use telling you my name. I come from your sister, not from your lawyer.’

‘I have no sister.’

‘Don’t talk nonsense. You have a sister who is blind and helpless. She wants to see her brother.’

‘I have neither father nor mother, brother or sister, or wife. I belong to Christ alone. My hand is to the plough and I must not turn aside.’

‘Come to see your sister. You must. I know you, Sir Percival, though you do not know me.’

‘I am no longer Sir Percival. Titles and honours are vain things. I am John Percy, able seaman. I am called to preach the gospel among the sailors.’

‘By all means. I do not ask you to abandon your vocation. I have just heard you preach. You have a very remarkable and persuasive power. You also believe in what you say. I should think that your efforts will be greatly successful. Some of your arguments are fresh, and your illustrations are apt.’

‘I want no man’s praise and I heed no man’s blame,’ said the sailor, roughly.

‘Of course,’ said Paul, ‘there is nothing to praise. You have received the conviction of the truth of certain doctrines: you have the power of oratory: you have therefore a natural desire to persuade others: you have left your estate and the duties to which you were born for the sake of gratifying others: you have become a common sailor for their sake and have learned how to speak to them. There is nothing to praise in this. I did not

say there was. It is all quite common: anybody could do as much. It is nothing.'

'Nothing at all,' said the sailor, yet with a doubtful look. Could not anybody do as much?

'It would be impossible to persuade you to give up your life. I suppose you know that it will probably end in your being cast away with some ill-found crazy craft.'

'It will end as my Master pleases.'

'Therefore, I do not ask you to give up your work for a single day,' Paul continued. 'I do not ask you to change your dress even. I ask nothing more than that you should pay a single visit, one—to your sister. It will make her profoundly uncomfortable, but she desires it.'

'I cannot leave my people. I am ordered to preach to them day and night. I *must* be continually in the service of the Master. Oh!' he tossed his head impatiently, 'I have no sister—I have no relations at all.'

'Your Master does not order you to neglect your sister. It is not as if she was

like other girls. She is blind, and dependent on others. Come to see her once, if for an hour only.'

'Is my sister converted? Has she been yet convicted of sin?'

'I don't know,' said Paul, 'I never asked her.'

'And yourself—are you converted?'

'No.'

'What are you doing with her?'

'I am on a visit to Lady Augusta.'

'Ah!' the sailor looked at him fixedly. 'I remember now. It is a house filled with devils. They practise forbidden things: they conjure by means of tables and chairs. Are you one of those who delude and deceive them?'

'I am not a Medium, if that is what you mean.'

'There is no voice permitted from the Dead to the Living. There is no Revelation except the one already made. Nothing can be added to what we know. After death we separate, each to his own place. Between the

world and Heaven on the one hand and Hell on the other is a great gulf fixed, so that those in Hell cannot hear the hymns of the saved, nor do those in Heaven hear the cries of the lost. It is vain and impious to inquire. Is my sister saved?'

'I do not know.'

'I will see her,' said Sir Percival. 'I may leave my work, provided that I cease not from the task of saving souls alive. Think not that my sister's soul is any more precious to me than any soul among those poor fellows. All are alike in the eyes of Him who made them. Yet I will see her, and if it is permitted, I will move her to repentance. We have talked enough. Tell her I wish to see her.'

'When will you see her?'

'I do not know. When I am commanded,' he replied, with the light of fanaticism in his eyes. 'I cannot promise.'

'You might come, for instance, when she was not at home. It would be a pity to waste your time.'

Sir Percival seemed struck with this

objection. It did not seem to him that if he was commanded to go the order would not be issued for a time when Cicely was not at home.

‘Will you come when I send you word?’ Paul asked. ‘Not to-day or to-morrow, because it is obvious that you are very much occupied with your labours. I wish they may meet with every success—but a little later.’

‘Send me word and I will come. Let me look at you. I know you now—I know you’—his eyes shot fire, and he recoiled as one starts back at the sight of a deadly snake; and then he assumed the attitude of one who is going for that snake to make an unpleasant minute for the creature.

‘I remember you, now. I remember where I saw you. Oh! you are yourself one of those who go about to deceive. That house attracts everything that is of the Devil. You are an emissary of the Devil. The house has long been filled with devils invisible. Now it is a Devil incarnate in you. Is my

sister in your hands? Then I must hasten to take her away from you. Liar and Deceiver!—go!’

Contrary to reasonable expectation, Paul did not fly at his throat. He staggered, hesitated, and then obeyed, leaving the place with no dignity at all. Outside, he felt mean. His early teaching suddenly and vividly brought back to his mind, made the words—while he was still under the impression of that memory—fall upon his soul like a lash laid across his shoulders. They were ignominious and humiliating words; he ought to have hurled them back again. He didn’t, because he couldn’t. Emissary of the Devil! Liar and Deceiver! Alas! while the old chapel was still in his mind could he deny those words? Alas! again—in the old days when he attended that chapel, if any one had called him a Liar and a Deceiver, he would certainly have gone for that accuser with any weapon that he could catch up.

He walked away, but the stiffening was out of his back; he was limp: he had meekly

borne a most deadly insult. And what did the man mean when he said that he remembered him? What did he remember? The day of final triumph was rapidly approaching and he could not afford any awkward memories to come along. Paul not only felt mean and small ; he felt uneasy.

CHAPTER XIII.

SLUDGE.

PAUL called the first cab he passed, and hastened to get away as fast as possible from a place where this disgusting plainness of speech was possible. But he arrived at Beaumont Street with looks still perturbed and a soul still agitated. To be called a Liar and a Deceiver, and to have no words of reply—not even a kick or a cuff—naturally causes a hurricane of rage and shame.

‘What is the matter, boy?’ asked his friend.

‘Nothing. Well—something—something incidental to the Profession, I suppose.’

‘Yes. As for example——’

‘The charge commonly made against those who deal with supernatural forces. And I had no reply.’

‘No reply, Paul?’ the old man looked up, sadly. ‘No reply? And after all these years?’

‘None ready. Oh, I know what I ought to have said. I had no reply ready for my enemy, because I could think of none for myself.’

‘The old prejudices again, Paul? Strange! I thought they had been long since removed.’

‘Old prejudices never die. They seem to be dead, and then at a touch they awake again. I began listening to a sermon—I was thinking only of the present. What was it? A touch, a word, and the years rolled back. I was in the old village chapel listening to the old preacher. I fell back into the old grooves—about sin and wrong and falsehood and truth, you know. Before I got back to the practical grooves, the man who was preaching turned upon me and used words concerning the Profession—they were like a stick upon my back. I could find no reply, and slunk away, like a beaten man. That’s all.’

‘Why, Paul, I thought you were harder. Have all these years—seven years of apprenticeship—done nothing for you? This it is to have an imagination as well as the magnetic gift. I should have thought that you had the reply always ready in your own mind. As for myself, I have that reply always ready, and it makes me perfectly easy. Why, let us confess it, my whole life has been spent in trading on men’s credulity. My present competency has been acquired by the profession which, above all others, demands credulity. Your travels, your manners, your developed powers, are also the result of my success. You are my professional son. Without me and my success you would have had to return to the paternal store. Therefore, we ought both of us to be always ready with our reply—first to the enemy and next to ourselves, in order to keep a calm conscience and to be able to entertain the same gratitude to Providence for our success which men of other professions cultivate.’

‘Well?’ said Paul, a smile lighting up his gloomy brow as a ray of sunshine across a black and surging sea.

‘Paul,’ continued the Veteran, ‘there is not among the whole tribe of mediums, clairvoyants, oracles and prophets, a single man who does not put the question to himself—what reply can I make to my own conscience? Not a man but seeks for an answer which shall justify himself. We must find that answer in self-defence, because we know very well the things that are said of us. I know not what answer other practitioners find, but the answer which I have found for myself satisfies me completely, and it ought to satisfy you. I have lived and grown rich by trading on men’s credulity. Let us admit so much. Men think I control the spirits. For aught I know there are not any spirits to be controlled. Yet I keep up the pretence. Am I then torn by remorse in my old age? Not a bit. And why? Because, Paul, in every trade and in every profession there must be deception. With-

out deception no trade, no profession, could be carried on. Does the shopkeeper sell what he pretends? Never; there is adulteration everywhere. Things of no value are blended with things valuable; the polished wood is veneer, the silver is plate, the sardines are sprats, the very rubies and emeralds are worthless stones polished up. Lies everywhere. Does the merchant content himself with a fair profit? Not if he can get an unfair profit. Does he pay the producer what he ought? Never. He sweats him whenever he can. Into my trade, which is that of Prophet and Oracle, and a very difficult trade it is, requiring the possession of the rarest faculties, which ought to be paid for at the highest rate, I brought a swift and keen intellect, kept polished and sharp by continual training and constant watching. I had to be learning and storing away in my memory every kind of fact which bears upon the conduct of life. I had to learn all the various ways which men live. More than that, I had to learn the hearts

of women and what they most desire. Boy, until I taught you what I myself had learned, there was no anatomist who knew so much about the body as I knew about the soul, and I taught you, Paul. You are wise, but you are young.'

'Yes—Daddy, yes—' Paul took his hand with an almost feminine caress—'I owe everything to you.'

'I had to keep in training. For this purpose, I had to forego all the joys of life. For me there was no love, because love, more than anything else, destroys the powers which our work demands. He whose mind is filled with the thought of one woman cannot keep his power over all women. There was no feasting in joyful assemblies, where men forget their own thoughts and submit to the influence of a crowd. I had no holidays because I could never relax. But I had my reward. I could read the thoughts of those who came to see me; and I could reveal the future as soon as they had told me the past.

You know, Paul—you know that there was no Prophet—no Oracle equal to myself.’

‘No ! You were alone.’

‘My intellect so far outstripped the sluggish brain of the multitude, that it seemed to them due to supernatural help. I accepted that explanation. I even advanced it. If I had told the foolish people that there were no spirits except in their fancy, they would have deserted me. I had the gift of understanding things in a tenth part of the time that they required. I called it—or they called it—we both called it—Clairvoyance—Advice of the spirits—anything. The people exaggerated my cleverness, and I traded on their stupidity. I made use of their stupidity. In order to do this it was necessary to dress up and set off with all kinds of little devices and pretences—what actors call business—which I employed mechanically, while my mind was acquiring and piecing together the real data of the problem. Why, even a shopkeeper sets off his wares to their best advantage, so

that a paste diamond, set with sham gold, looks in its plush case the most precious jewel.'

'Go on,' said Paul, smiling. 'I know it all by heart. But it is comfortable to hear it again.'

'Between ourselves we do not deny the machinery, Paul. We need not. Our answer to those who charge us with cheaterly and trickery is to get behind our machinery. Among ourselves our answer is that there is nothing done by us which is not done by every other profession. Can the physician stave off disease? Certainly not. Yet he pretends. Does he know how his drugs act? No, but he pretends. Does he even know what is the disease which is killing his patient? No; he gives it a name and classifies it according to its symptoms. But he does not know it. Yet he pretends. Does the physicist understand that nature whose laws he is always discovering? Not a bit. He finds a law; he discovers a force. What then? We are no farther advanced. Who

made the law? Who directs the force? He does not know. But he pretends. Is the lawyer more competent than yourself to manage your affairs? Not a bit. But he pretends. And to keep himself employed he makes business as complicated as he can. Does the clergyman know any more about the next world than we ourselves know? Not a bit. But he pretends. In order to keep himself going he pretends to supernatural powers. If he were not to pretend, his congregation would leave him. Is the writer of the political articles in the papers any better informed than his neighbours? Not a bit. But he pretends. The world is carried on by the men of the professions, and the men of the professions live—they all live—upon the credulity of the people.’

‘Yes,’ said Paul. ‘It is quite true.’

‘The best of it is that we all know it, but we do not whisper it even among ourselves. The whole of education is meant to fit a clever man with the best means for discovering and trading upon the credulity of

mankind. You and I, my dear boy, and our tribe, are only like the clergyman, the doctor, and the lawyer. We all have our pretences and our shams; on the other hand we all have our natural gifts and the skill which comes from training. You, with your machinery of the Hidden and Ancient Way, conceal or set off a power which is real, though not so great as they believe. Is that a sufficient reply, Paul, to this old prejudice?'

Paul sighed.

'It is sufficient, I suppose. Let it pass, Daddy. I was a fool to be vexed with the words of a fanatic. Let us talk of other things. The time is running short. Only a few days now before the grand *coup*.'

'You will carry your grand *coup*, Paul. In fact, it cannot fail.'

'And after?'

'Yes, Paul—after; what will follow?'

'I am divided. I do not see my way so clearly as I ought. I cannot decide. It seems as if I have somehow lost nerve, of late.'

‘At this point, Paul, the path becomes extremely perilous. You propose to burn your boats. It will be impossible for you to go back upon your steps. You can never, once having achieved results so magnificent and unheard of, become the adviser and the oracle. The fame of this achievement will spread far and wide. Too much will be expected. Already the papers are beginning to speak of the Indian paper mystery. There is a note on it in yesterday’s “Pall Mall Gazette,” and another in “St. James’s Gazette.” They are nasty ones, but that you might expect. One of them demands a repetition—says that if the thing could be done once it could be done again; the other asks for an authorised and attested account of what was really done. Nothing could advertise you better, and if I knew the London journalists as I used to know those of New York, I would keep the ball rolling with paragraph after paragraph. The time is coming, if you are to reap any solid advantage out of these miracles, when the Press should take up

the thing seriously. Paul, the more I think of it the more persuaded I am that the Press exists entirely for the advancement of the adventurer. First he begins to be noticed in a short paragraph and in an obscure corner of the paper—a good many never get beyond that corner; if he is a good man he is able to push the advantage: next he advances to the stage of being reported whenever he makes a public appearance; thirdly, not only do his utterances get printed, but his journeys and wanderings are published; he has become a Man of the Age. Moral, Paul: You have excited the public curiosity; keep it up.’

‘You are always wise, Daddy,’ said Paul.

‘Will you tell me, now, how you did the Indian Paper Mystery?’

‘My Friends—’ he began, but burst out laughing. ‘Daddy—it was too simple. I almost feared that they would find it out on the spot. Even Tom, who came on purpose to detect me, was caught with the rest. Some day I will tell you all about it.’

‘Very well. I will wait. Remember, Paul, you cannot be always working such miracles as the appearance of this day’s paper brought from Delhi.’

‘That is quite true,’ said Paul. ‘And it is the chief danger of the situation.’

‘People always expect more miracles and fresh miracles. They will want you to heal the sick——’

‘I have done it. The servants bring all their friends who have got toothache or headache. I heal them by imposition of hands. I can go on doing that—unless——’ He stopped short.

‘To get them messages from the other world.’

‘That is always easy.’

‘To advise them as to their conduct in difficult junctures.’

‘That is also easy. You have taught me how to do that.’

‘To bring them to-day’s “New York Herald”——’

‘Yes,’ said Paul, rubbing his chin. ‘The

Indian experiment cannot very well be repeated.'

'You are going to save a family from the loss of a great sum of money. They will want you to save everybody from getting into trouble.'

'Ye—yes. Perhaps that will be only part of the advice or oracle business.'

'No ; because you can never put the blame on the spirits. Your Friends must be infallible. Paul, I see only two ways out of it.'

'Namely?'

'The first is to imitate your predecessor, the illustrious Cagliostro, and get as much money out of your disciples as you can. Form a new Freemasonry as he did.'

'The other way, Daddy?'

'The other way would be to get your College established under a magnificent name, and become the Director. Then you could declare the Age of Miracles was finally closed, and so prevent anybody else from stepping into your shoes. You are clever, Paul.

There is nobody, that I ever heard of, who possessed your gifts of quickness, thought reading, and magnetic powers. You must own that I cultivated them.'

'You did, Daddy, you did.'

'Yet a quicker man than you may any day come across the Ocean. Do not nourish illusions.'

'I will not. My powers may fail; there may be a better man coming along. Yet I see a third way.'

'What is that?'

'It is that which I indicated a month ago. At the very height of greatness, and in the very glow and first excitement of the crowning miracles—to disappear.'

'How will you live afterwards? Whither will you go? If to New York, your fame will follow you. Paul, be reasonable. Make hay while the sun shines. Make money while the disciples are flocking in. Use your musical voice and your dark eyes, my dear boy, for practical purposes. All the women will fall in love with you. Let them, if they wish,

bring offerings, but keep your own heart cold if you wish to retain your powers. Mark that, Paul. A man of your temperament, if he dares to fall in love, will plunge head over ears and will be ruined hopelessly, Paul. I looked for such great things from you. I thought that after your European tour, and after learning all the newest jargon from the newest pretenders, you would go back to America the pride of the profession. Do not disappoint me, Paul. I did pretty well for many years. You know how large a circle of believers I had. They would do nothing without consulting me. You remember? I was the most respectable of practitioners in the city. But what was I compared with what you might be with youth and all your gifts? Paul—be persuaded. You may be, if you play the cards rightly, the King of the Profession.’

Paul hesitated.

‘The whole charm of the thing,’ he said, ‘lies in going off suddenly. To disappear; to be no more heard of; to be a dream in the

memory of those who have believed ; to be written about as one who appeared, wrought great marvels, spoke of strange powers, and then—vanished. Think of that ! A figure in History for writers to discuss and to wrangle over. The mysterious Herr Paulus—whence came he ? Is he a myth ?’

‘ Yes, it is a grand conception : it is worthy of you, Paul. But be practical. Oh ! my dear boy, don’t give your career away for a dream. It’s like killing yourself just at the moment when you are certain to have a grand funeral and a beautiful send-off notice in all the papers. It is grand—but don’t do it, Paul.’

‘ I will consider,’ said Paul.

‘ When is the next miracle coming off ?’

‘ On the 23rd—in four days. Nearly everything is ready. It will be a truly touching day. Even Sibyl will be reconciled to me, and Tom will be disarmed. I wish you would put in an appearance, my dear Daddy, for one night only, as Izák Ibn Menelek.’

‘ Could that be managed, Paul ? I am so

lame with this confounded rheumatism, that I am afraid—no—no—it can't be. The idea must be abandoned.'

'And on the day after—while their hearts are all aglow—to vanish! It will be magnificent! But, Daddy, that man to-day. His voice brought back the old chapel and the old simplicity, and the old thoughts. A prejudice—a survival—think no more about it.'

CHAPTER XIV.

ON ADVANTAGEOUS TERMS.

WHILE they talked there was heard a single knock—the single knock of a humble person at the door. One knock for the humble person, two for the postman, three for the person of social pretensions. Reader, let us be thankful that we can use the triple knock. The old housekeeper presently reported that a man wished to speak with the Professor on business. Party of the name of Medlock, they heard the caller explain.

‘Here is the man Medlock, Paul,’ the old man whispered. ‘I will talk with him alone. Best for him not to know that you are in England. Go into the back room and keep the door open. If I call, you can come in. If not you can listen.’

The caller was a man of fifty springs or

thereabouts. He left his hat and great coat in the hall, and appeared dressed in black with an open frock coat, a waistcoat with a rolling collar, and a broad expanse of shirt, clean and spotless. But his clothes were ill-fitting and gave him the appearance of a very humble Baptist Minister, one of those who have taken the first step only from the counter to the pulpit in the little country town. He was clean shaven, thin and pale. His hair was grey, he was slight of figure, somewhat shorter than the average, and presented generally the air of complete insignificance. Nobody is really insignificant, because anybody can light a lucifer match and burn down a Palace. But some men look insignificant, especially men who are short and spare and have small features.

‘I do not remember you, Mr. Medlock, but you have written to me.’

‘No, sir, you do not. Naturally, because you have never seen me before. I have admired you, sir, from the crowd. I am respectable, but I hail from the crowd.’ There

was a perceptible American twang in his talk, but not fully developed. It had been acquired late in life, and it was grafted on that branch of the Essex dialect which we call Cockney.

‘You wrote to me about my late pupil. Before we speak of that matter tell me who you are and what credentials you possess. What you ask, Mr. Medlock, is perhaps a bigger thing than you suspect.’

‘I will tell you, sir, if you will grant me five minutes of your time. I will show you my credentials and I will tell you why I wrote to you.’

‘Then take a chair and proceed.’

‘My name, sir, is Medlock—widely known as Haynes Medlock in the profession, just as they say Henry Irving and not Irving, or Charles Dickens and not Dickens.’

‘In what profession? Are you an actor?’

‘No, sir. Not an actor. I have been engaged—largely in fact, extensively, engaged—in the show business for many years—for eighteen years, in fact.’

‘In the show business. Did you make money in that business?’

‘I did not, sir. There is money in it, as nobody knows better than myself. But the money goes to the Boss, not to the men who run the show for the Boss. I’ve helped to run a good many shows, but it seldom amounted to more than grub and plank, and as for hours—a tram conductor is not in it.’

‘Well, sir!’

‘Well, sir. I am coming to the point gradually. First, I want you to understand that I am a man of experience. Haynes Medlock is a well-known man in the States, though as yet he has never run a show on his own account. I’ve been most things that a man can be connected with shows. I know the whole business, from taking the money at the doors, which any one can do, to preparing the posters and writing the newspaper paragraphs, which wants genius. I have also been travelling lecturer. I have described a diorama between the music; I have lectured

on lime-light views while the operator showed them ; I have introduced to the audience the young lady without arms who played the harp with her toes ; I have made talk on the stage while the conjuror managed his tricks ; I've travelled with a giant and a dwarf, and lectured on them in their presence ; I have gone around with a Camera Obscura. I have been assistant to a craniologist. There is nothing, I believe, in the nature of a show that I haven't done, short of playing the cornet—not that I would be too proud to play the cornet, only I don't know how.'

'Proceed, sir.'

'Well, sir. I have acquired so much knowledge of the business—— I may truly say that in posters I yield to none, and my advertisements are allowed to be works of genius of a high order—that it occurred to me that I might rise to be a Boss myself, and run a show of my own.'

'How long, did you say, have you worked in this line?'

'Eighteen years.'

‘And a paid help all the time. Are you an American born?’

‘No, sir; I am an Englishman.’

‘If you had been an American you would have made yourself Boss a dozen years ago and more. Go on.’

‘The kind of show I thought of was a superior spiritualist show. I would have everything in it, sir. The old-fashioned medium, though this is a little out of date, as one may say, always draws if the thing is carefully worked. I would have the raps and messages and all that, not forgetting the heavenly music. I play myself, very sweetly, on the concertina, so that the heavenly music may be safely advertised. I can also use the camera, so that spirit-photographs will always appear upon the posters. As for drawing on the ceiling, I have practised with the lazy tongs, and as for floating in the air, I’ve done it on the stage with the conjuror. Thought reading, of course, I understand, and finding things hidden away.’

‘Pray go on.’

‘I would also include palmistry, which I am told is now fashionable in this country. And reading characters from handwriting. This rakes in the money. Craniology—they always like that if the patter is well done.’

‘You might add astrology and astronomy and alchemy while you are about it, to make the show complete.’

‘Thank you, sir, I will make a note of your suggestion. Anything from you——’

‘And now, sir, pray, what do you propose?’

‘To run your pupil, sir, on advantageous terms, sir. I know what is due to that young gentleman. First, sir, allow me to continue. I had a wife in the old days before I went to the States. She became a medium and frightened me. I confess, sir, that she frightened me out of the house with her spirits. Fairly drove me out. I was a fool to go, because she afterwards became a great medium, and I could have run her, on advantageous terms, of course; whereas she has only fooled herself away, and is now, I hear,

in reduced circumstances. I ought to have known there was money in it. But I did not, and I ran away. Well, when first I thought of this, then of course I naturally remembered my wife.'

'Naturally.'

'And I came straight home to look for her. I thought she would be just the medium that I wanted.'

'Well—and you have seen her and she won't go away with you.'

'No, sir, I wasn't fool enough to speak to her before making inquiries. I have seen her but she hasn't seen me. She's lost all her business and all her powers, as far as I can learn. Nobody goes to her and she's poor, and she's old, and, which is worse, she looks poor. Lavinia never was much in the way of looks, but when she was young she had her points. My show wants beauty and youth—at all events, youth. If I had youth and beauty I could do anything. Well. I was obliged to give up the idea. Then I heard that you were in London, and I remembered

hearing of your pupil, and I thought, sir, considering that he will probably be wanting a run through the States, and that he must have an agent, why should he not have me? Stop a moment, sir. Don't say no all at once. Consider. I know all the dodges—every one. I do indeed. I am up to everything within the show and out of it. Not that I actually do the things myself—but I am a skilled assistant to those who do—a confederate who can be trusted—a bonnet, if I may so speak, of fidelity and zeal. As such, sir, I should be invaluable. And as for terms, they would be advantageous. Highly advantageous.'

'What, sir!' The Professor sat upright in his chair, and bent upon this unhappy man eyebrows so white and bushy, and shook in his face a crutch so thick and threatening that he trembled and gasped. 'What, sir! You dare to ask me to engage you in the capacity of a successful confederate and a cheat? You dare to insult me by assuming that my life, my blameless and honourable career, has been stained by trickery? You dare, sir, I ask, to

come here and do this? Go, sir, go. Remove yourself from my presence. If I were younger, if I had the use of my limbs, you would go through the window, not for the insult you offer to me, but for that you have offered to the Sacred Cause of Spiritualism.'

An archbishop accused of cheating at euchre could not have exhibited a loftier indignation. The good old man fell back in his chair exhausted, but glaring with wrath and indignant virtue.

'I beg your pardon, sir. I—I——'

'It is such men as yourself, with your accordions and your speaking tubes and your lazy tongs, by which you imitate the phenomena of manifestations, who bring discredit on our sacred calling.'

'Sir! Professor! I beg your pardon. I do indeed. I didn't mean any insult. I won't say another word about the conjuring tricks. But if I could get an appointment I should give every satisfaction. I've excellent manners and a winning way'—he smiled engagingly, to show how winning that way was. 'In the

outer office, to receive visitors and to prepare their minds and raise their curiosity, I should be invaluable. Forgive me, sir. If you won't help me, sir, I must go back to my wife—to Lavinia.' He shuddered. 'To Lavinia, in order to borrow money to get back to the States, where I am honourably known.'

'Your name is Medlock, you say. Is your wife Lavinia Medlock?'

'Yes, sir, Lavinia Medlock.'

'She was formerly a Medium of some note. You do not wish to go back to her. You would be only a burden to her. You had a daughter, I think. Yes, yes. For your wife's sake, only for her sake, mind—I might help you—yes,'—the Professor gazed steadfastly at the man as if he was reading him through and through—'What is your present address?'

'I have a bedroom in Hunter Street, Bloomsbury.'

'What were you formerly?'

'I was a clerk, sir, on a hundred and twenty pounds a year—and we let lodgings—'

but Lavinia filled the house with ghosts to such a degree——’

‘Yes—and you’ve been all the time in the States going about with shows. Well—you are not going to be my pupil’s agent, but I may help you if you show me that you are worth help. Can you stay on at Hunter Street for another week?’

‘As long as you like, sir, if it will lead to anything.’

‘You are not to go near your wife at present. You are not to write to her or to let her know that you have returned.’

‘I don’t want to.’

‘Very good—here is a sovereign. You will have a letter from me, perhaps, in a day or two. Take care to obey it. Now you can go.’

The man retired, and Paul came forth from the bedroom where he had overheard the conversation.

‘Well, Paul, how does this coincidence help you? Coincidences are always happen-

ing, always. What brought that man here? Why, he is the father of that girl, Paul.'

'Yes. He is Hetty's father. What will Hetty think of him? He is not exactly a father to be proud of, is he?'

'To restore to that girl her long-lost father would be, methinks, a miracle of the more wonderful, Paul. Pity he isn't rich—as he would be in a novel.'

'He seems a most detestable little snob. But still—it would please Hetty. I will do it, Daddy; I will do it. Hetty's father and Cicely's brother. Both in one day! Both in one day!'

CHAPTER XV.

TOM'S DISCOVERY.

ONLY one day before the 23rd. And not a word or a sign from the mysterious three who held those cheques. Paul, however, preserved an unabated cheerfulness. On this morning—the 22nd—when the party broke up after breakfast, Tom and Sibyl, obedient to a sign from the former, lingered behind.

‘I told you, Dodo,’ he said, as soon as they were alone, ‘that I should track him out.’

‘Well, Tom, and have you? And it is not too late?’

‘Come up to my workshop. No one will look for you there; and I’ve got lots of things to tell you.’

‘Now, Dodo,’ he said, having gained the security and loneliness of that retreat, ‘I have

really done it—I have found him out. And I am ready to spring the whole thing upon him.’

‘Does he know or suspect anything?’

‘Not a word.’

‘Oh!’ Sibyl smiled sweetly, as a woman can smile who sees her enemy humbled. ‘And he is after all, as I have always suspected, a mere impostor and swindler. Well, it is only one more. He will be followed by another, I dare say quite as bad.’

‘Not quite, Dodo, dear. Your feminine way of putting things is perhaps too downright. Women love a clear outline.’

‘We love truth.’

‘Unfortunately,’ said the Physicist, ‘nothing in nature has a clear outline. Well, my child, I am not prepared to call bad names. A swindler or an impostor is generally a person who obtains money under false pretences. I have no evidence at all, as yet, that our friend Paul has obtained money under false pretences. He may, for aught I know, propose to stick to all those very considerable

sums now lying in the bank to the account of the illustrious Izák Ibn Menelek, descendant of King Solomon and Queen Sheba ; Reuben P. Zeigler, of Philadelphia ; and Surabjee Kam-sitjee, of Bombay. I say that he may, but I do not believe that he does. If he does he will find himself in Queer Street, with a clear prospect of a healthy life under lonely conditions for a longish term of years. I say, Dodo, that if he does he will be astonished. Because I am ready to demonstrate in open court the method by which that money was extracted from your father.'

Sibyl sighed. 'Oh ! I knew all along that he must have taken it.'

'He hasn't stolen it, Dodo. That is to say—not as yet. But he was the means by which the shares were sold—of that I am certain. Remember, please, that had it not been for the sale of those shares everything would have been lost.'

'Everything is lost, Tom,' said Sibyl, with assurance.

'First of all, I told you that Lavinia put

me on the scent. An old gentleman who had been in the service of the Company, and had all his money invested there, came to her alarmed by a whisper from the office. She could get no counsel and asked Paul's advice. Paul understood the situation and saved the man's money. More than that, he saved ours——'

'So you say.'

'It was not, you observe, his "Friends" who warned him, nor was it at the instigation of his "Friends" that he acted. It was by an accident: he was consulted. I have seen the man whom he advised. He tells everybody how he asked the spirits and how, Lavinia's spirits being unequal to the task, he sent his case to Herr Paulus, who ordered him to sell instantly. Without his advice he would have gone to the workhouse. Without his action a like fate would have befallen us, sweet Dodo. If not quite the workhouse, our union would have been put off indefinitely.'

'It is put off indefinitely as it is,' said Sibyl. 'Only yesterday my father called me

into his study, and after reminding me of the Vocation to which he had destined me from the cradle, told me that the time was now come when I must put my life seriously under the instruction of our Prophet.'

'And you replied?'

'I told him that my Vocation was quite in the opposite direction—and then—we had a scene. How can I change his resolution?'

'I shall try what I can do, presently,' said Tom. 'Meantime, we can at any time make it impossible for that resolution to be carried into effect.'

Sibyl shook her head.

'No, Tom; not without his consent. But go on about Paul.'

'I was greatly pleased at this little discovery, and I began to think. I kept on thinking and watching. One morning when he went out, I followed him. It was not difficult, for he never looked round, and I kept on one side of the street while he walked on the other. When he came to St. Pancras Church, the great new church, he left the

Marylebone Road and walked across the churchyard into the Marylebone High Street. He crossed the street and walked along a row of small houses which they call Beaumont Street, and at one of these he stopped, and opened the door with a latch-key, and walked in as if the place belonged to him. So, you see, our man, who came straight from St. Petersburg, and who, we thought, knew no one at all in England, had a friend living in Beaumont Street, Marylebone.'

'It shows that he told us lies, but it does not show anything else, Tom, does it?'

'First, my dearest Dodo, to use the words of the Quaker, thou utterest an untruth, and then thou askest a question. As he never *said* that he had no friends here it does not show that he told lies. When I came to find out the name of his friend it seemed to prove a great deal. For his friend is no other than the great Professor Melchers himself, of New York.'

'I never heard of him.'

'Nor had I until I was told about him.'

Professor Melchers, until his health broke down, was the greatest oracle in New York. Hundreds of our fellow-creatures, presumed to be sane, would take no decisive step, however trivial, without consulting the Professor, whose advice was followed blindly. There are heaps of stories told of his insight, and the wonderful results obtained by those who bought his opinion. Of course he was connected with the Other World, presumably with the Spirits of Dick Whittington, Jacques Cœur, Sir Thomas Gresham, Messrs. Astor, Vanderbilt, Stewart, and all the goodly company of those who have made money and no doubt still keep up their interest in the process. Well, Sibyl, here comes in the interesting part. The Professor grew old: the Professor took a pupil: the Professor retired from business and went away on his travels: his pupil went with him. The pupil's name was Signor Paolo. Now do you begin to understand? None of the old business with raps and Emanuel Chicks and Lavinia Medlocks; nothing of the kind—a fine old established

City Oracle ; a place of inquiry for those who deal in stocks and shares ; magic and mystery brought to bear on finance ; the Spirits made useful ; communications with the other world restricted to matters of business. No wonder the Professor did well and made a little pile.'

'Is this important?'

'Very important indeed.'

'What next?'

'Come on the roof with me.'

There was a trap door in one corner and a short ladder, which Tom raised, and, mounting it, opened the door. Sibyl followed. Outside there was a tolerably broad area, bounded by a low parapet.

'Look over the parapet, Dodo. You can see into your father's study.'

The study, as has been related, was built out from the house. Tom's room was at the end of the house, and from the roof anybody standing near the end could look straight into the large side window of the study, and could see what was being done over that part of it covered by the table and the chair and the

hearthrug—in other words, over the habitable portion of the study.

‘I have improved upon this side view,’ said Tom, ‘by a little arrangement of glasses and things. Step in here, Dodo.’

He had erected on the leads a small low chamber, not much higher than the parapet, with coarse tarpaulin sides. He pushed the tarpaulin apart and Sibyl entered. Within there was a round table painted white. Tom came after her and closed the hangings behind him. Then it was quite dark.

‘Tom, what is the meaning of it?’ she asked.

Tom did something—turned a handle perhaps—and instantly on the table there showed a picture bright, clear, and in the natural colours. It was the picture of the study. Sibyl saw the hearthrug, the fireplace, the great table, with the books and papers upon it, the wooden chair, and the long low chair beside the fire. It was a beautiful picture, much better than a photograph, on account of the colours. Presently out of the external

blackness Sibyl saw her father glide into the picture and sit down at the table. Then he took a pen and began to make calculations.

‘We are unlucky this morning,’ said Tom. ‘I could have shown you how he goes off every day to Abyssinia. I could have shown you how Paul exercises that power of his by which he made Cicely and Hetty see what he pleased. You would have seen your father, apparently dead, suddenly sit up—turn round his chair and write at Paul’s orders. Then you would have seen Paul fold up the letters and put them in his own pocket, take the keys and examine the safe, read your father’s correspondence, look in his drawers ; even search his pockets.’

‘Let me out, Tom,’ cried Sibyl. ‘I cannot watch my father. Oh ! it is horrible that a man should have such power.’

‘It is strange. But there is no doubt of it. After a time you would have seen him awaken his patient. In these trances, Dodo, he has made your father carry on the business about the shares——’

‘But, Tom, this is awfully, terribly dangerous. This is far worse than I feared.’

‘It is very dangerous; nothing could be more dangerous. A man possessed of this power could strip a man of everything, if he chose. Because, you see, your father does not know that this man has this power over him. All he can say is that he does not know why he wrote certain letters and signed certain cheques—he cannot remember. If a man cannot remember the performance of these most important acts, he had better go and be locked up at once. Now, you see, I am ready as an eyewitness. I have seen things done which prove to me, as clearly as anything can be proved, how the business was effected. Paul is a mighty clever young man, but I have been one too many for him. I warned him that I should watch him.’

‘What—what are you going to do with the knowledge, Tom?’

‘I am going to denounce him, of course. I shall take the opportunity to-morrow, while all the world is admiring the wonderful way

in which our fortunes have been saved, lost and restored to us, of explaining the process.'

'You do not know that he will give back the money.'

'I am certain he will. I have my own theory of his purpose—and it is not robbery.'

'And about the Indian paper, Tom?'

'I do not understand the Indian Paper Trick. But then there are many tricks which I do not understand. For instance the Great Mango Trick. That is a capital trick, which has, so far, defied discovery. So with the Indian Paper Trick.'

'I am glad he has been detected,' said Sibyl. 'I shall rejoice to see him exposed. But will my father ever believe in your explanation? Will he give up his new gospel?'

CHAPTER XVI.

I GIVE CONSENT.

It was a pity that Sibyl did not remain five minutes longer in the Camera Obscura, because she would have been rewarded by the sight of Paul with her father. He entered the study, in fact, just as she left that ingenious machine upon the roof.

Mr. Brudenel was horribly nervous. The calculations he had been making considered the possible loss of all the money, and were therefore perhaps a measure of his faith.

‘Paul!’ he cried. ‘Oh, how glad I am you are come. Bring me some comfort, my dear friend. Have you no message for me? None at all? Consider.’

‘None. Have you no Faith?’ Paul pointed sternly to the calculations.

‘I have perfect Faith, Paul, perfect.’ Yet his anxious eyes might make one incredulous as to the perfection. ‘I am assured as to their good intentions. My only fear is that, considering the insignificance of the business and the worthlessness of money—mere money—and their natural indifference whether we get it or not——’

‘Yes,’ Paul replied, gravely. ‘There is that danger. But on the other hand, remember that the money stands in the name of Three. They have been transported from Bombay, from Abyssinia, and from America on purpose to receive this money and place it in the Bank after the modern fashion. The venerable Izák, I suppose, never had any money before in the whole of his long life. I think that the mere fact of his receiving it will remind him that it is not an indifferent matter to you—not because you, personally, value money——’

‘I do not, Paul. You—that is, your Friends—have taught me better things.’ Nothing could be more humble than Mr.

Brudenel's attitude of mind, or even of body. The very humility belied his words. His forehead was lined with care and his eyes were haggard. If he had been thinking all day and all night about the money, he could not have looked more anxious nor would he have valued it more.

'You do not care about the money,' Paul repeated. 'But your honour is engaged.'

'Yes, yes. My honour is engaged ; and all the poor children's money—all. And the Company—my Company bankrupt. My honour is engaged. If they do not get back their money I have resolved to sell my house and all that it contains. Lady Augusta has enough for us to live upon in humble style ; and as for the land, it would be a thousand pities to sell it now. I will give the rent to the children in my lifetime, and divide it among them at my death. I acted for the best ; but if I have lost their money I must pay it back. If I could only remember why I sold the shares, and why I signed those cheques——'

‘You forget every day what has passed between you and Izák Ibn Menelek. You have forgotten daily for two months. And yet you wonder why you have forgotten this single circumstance. Lay it all—forgetfulness and everything—at the door of Izák, and have Faith.’

Mr. Brudenel sighed heavily. By constantly repeating that he had Faith, he had come to believe himself; yet, as has been already stated, he trembled and tossed at night, and he fidgeted by day, just for all the world as if he had none. Yet he had an example in his household. Lady Augusta and Cicely, and with them Hetty, had perfect Faith, and looked for the day with joyful confidence. There would be, they were persuaded, another manifestation, and the Exhibition of such power as had never yet been vouchsafed to the imperfect West.

But behold! Strange and unexpected are the ways of Sages.

While they thus talked together, these

two, the message, so eagerly desired, came to Paul.

He suddenly stood up as if listening, with respect and awe upon his face.

‘He has spoken,’ he said to Mr. Brudenel.

‘What does he say?’

‘There are conditions. On certain conditions—nay—one condition only, their inheritance will be saved for the children.’

‘What is the condition?’

‘You have always desired that your daughter should remain single, devoted to the advance of true Spiritualism, which you have now learned to call the Ancient Way.’

‘That is true. You have yourself taught me that in the highest degrees there is no marriage. I have desired for Sibyl the condition of the greatest happiness, in which the mind is distracted by no passion and suffers from no anxiety.’

‘You have. But you forget one thing. One human being cannot thus dispose of another without her consent.’

‘There is nothing which Sibyl will not do to please me.’

‘Doubtless she will obey, but not in the spirit. What is the good of being a celibate if the heart is always yearning after the lower, but the common lot. What do you think of the man who cuts the tonsure and takes the vows, yet all his life dreams of the outer world and the joys he has missed?’

‘But Sibyl has no desire to change. She is happy at the prospect before her.’

‘She would be, perhaps, but for one reason. You have forgotten that Sibyl’s nature is antipathetic to all your pursuits and aims. Such a man as myself has no power over her. Cicely believes, and is rewarded by visions, such as were never before vouchsafed to a blind girl. Hetty believes and is rewarded’—he blushed, remembering—‘in other ways. Lady Augusta believes. But Sibyl cannot believe.’

‘She will believe when she learns more.’

‘She will never believe. You yourself have been able to distinguish between the

tricks of the charlatans who surround the Mystery and the Mystery itself. Men like Chick, women like Lavinia Medlock, who have some humble share of power, and supplement their deficiencies by tricks and shams, have disgusted your daughter. My dear sir, if she will not believe ME, whom will she believe?' Paul raised his eyes, full of candour and pure sincerity, free from any boastfulness, though with any other man the words would have sounded boastful. 'Whom will she ever believe?' he repeated.

'She *must* believe. The things you have done——'

'She will never believe, I assure you. Resign yourself to that fact. I have no power over her. She is personally anti-pathetic. She is actively hostile: I have endeavoured, but in vain, to soften her. She belongs to that large part of humanity to whom this world's phenomena are everything. She is a materialist by birth. Give her up. Nay, you must, since Izák Ibn Menelek commands it.'

‘ If I give her up——’

‘ You will give her to the keeping of another. You will never more be troubled by anxiety on account of her infidelity.’

‘ Give her to another. To whom ?’

‘ You will give her—to Tom Langston.’

‘ Sibyl! To Tom Langston!’

‘ They command it.’

‘ But Tom is an infidel of the deepest dye. He has always scoffed—secretly in this house—openly out of it. I do not know why I have allowed him to remain in it—except because I am his guardian. Give Sibyl to a man who will teach her to deride her father as well as the Cause to which he has given his life? Never.’

‘ You must.’

‘ Besides, you have just reminded me that one human being cannot thus bestow another. Would you have me offer my girl to this young man?’

‘ Have you eyes, Mr. Brudenel? Has no one in this house any eyes at all? Do you not see that your daughter is beauti-

ful? Have you never seen Tom looking at her?’

‘Never.’ In fact, nobody had. If a young man is always about the house from boyhood, nobody ever has any eyes.

‘Love is betrayed by looks, Mr. Brudenel. Give your daughter to Tom, and they will be both happy. More than that, you will turn derision into respect and scoffing into silence—if not conversion.’

‘This is the condition imposed by your friends. Does Tom—does Sibyl—know anything about it?’

‘Neither of them knows of it.’

Mr. Brudenel heaved a sigh.

‘I cannot,’ he said. ‘It is hard. It is the shattering of a great hope. I thought that my daughter would become the High Priestess of the new religion—the Vestal—the Oracle through whom the secrets of the other world, which you have fully opened to me, should be made known to others——’

‘And now that can never happen. Courage, Mr. Brudenel, there will arise pillars

of the Temple, who will sustain the edifice—your edifice—when you have passed across the narrow line to the life beyond. But you must write. Oh! you will not forget this time.’

‘To whom must I write? To Izák Ibn Menelek?’

‘He needs no letter. He is here—he is with us—he is looking on while we speak. Write to Tom. Say, “Dear Tom,—I have been informed of your attachment to Sibyl. I did not suspect this. I am informed that you were silent because your own views on things spiritual are antagonistic to my own. I am now assured that the future I had imagined for my daughter will be impossible. The wise men, living and dead, with whom I am now daily conversing, tell me that they are powerless against certain natures, to which you and Sibyl belong. I withdraw, therefore, my original plan of Sibyl’s future. Address her when you please. The joys of love and marriage are poor and transitory compared with the joys for which I fondly destined her.

Such joys as the world and the present life have, you will, I trust, be able to give my child. And in the other world, when you discover that the phenomenal is not the real, you will, with her, begin to climb to the higher planes, where you will find me with others who love her and will joyfully welcome her.' "

Paul dictated this letter, while Mr. Brudenel wrote obediently. When it was finished he folded it and placed it in an envelope which he directed in the usual way.

I mention this trivial circumstance because after doing so Mr. Brudenel lifted his eyes to Paul, who stood beside him. The action occupied a moment—less than a moment. He dropped his eyes again. But the letter was gone.

‘Where is it?’ he asked.

‘I don’t know. I suppose that Izák himself has taken it. Perhaps he will send it to Tom. Courage! To-morrow evening will bring happiness to all.’

‘Paul,’ said Mr. Brudenel. ‘How can I

thank you?’ The tears stood in his eyes. ‘How can I ever thank you for all that you have done?’

‘You must not try to thank me. I am but a servant. Now rest easy, only take care to say nothing about the letter—not a word, mind, either to Tom or to Sibyl. Leave the delivery of the letter to—those who have taken it. My dear friend,’ he took Mr. Brudenel’s hand and held it, ‘it is, believe me, an infinite happiness to feel that I have been instrumental in aiding and in saving you. Sit down, amuse yourself, read a novel—there is that book of Ouida’s still in your drawer, unfinished. Come out and see the people in the streets, go and talk at your club.’ Mr. Brudenel belonged to one of the sepulchral clubs, where about a dozen members are acquainted, and the rest of the men glare solemnly at each other. ‘Go and look at pictures: take Sibyl to the theatre this evening and laugh at something funny.’ Mr. Brudenel had not been to the theatre for thirty years. Perhaps he might have laughed

once or twice during that period, but no one remembered it. 'Anyhow, be happy and free from care. And own, Mr. Brudenel, that you have been, above all other men, strangely and wonderfully dealt with.'

Mr. Brudenel sank back into his chair and clasped his hands, as one who is overwhelmed by what his former friends would have called a cosmic wave of psychic force. The contemplation of an elderly bald-headed gentleman in such a condition has in it something comic. Paul, with a light in his eye which betokened appreciation, retired and softly closed the door.

CHAPTER XVII.

SAMSON AND DELILAH.

OUTSIDE, he smiled—nay, he laughed, but not aloud. Then he made as if he was going to put on his coat and hat. Then he stopped, half turned, and hesitated.

Every young person who hesitates, whether a male young person or a female young person, is lost. For, before every young person at every moment the ways divide; and the only chance of keeping in the strait and narrow way is to stride along, looking neither to the right nor to the left. As one gets older, these ways still strike out on either hand, but one ceases to regard them. Habit fixes the eyes, or age has deprived those ways of their attractions.

Paul, therefore, hesitated. He knew that

in the upper room—Cicely's room—Hetty sat alone. He had seen Lady Augusta with Sibyl and Cicely getting into the carriage; they were going to Regent Street on business of personal adornment. Hetty was upstairs, alone. Hetty was upstairs—alone.

It was a week since that first fatal yielding to the voice of passion, when he kissed the girl and fled. He fled with hot cheeks and trembling hands, wondering and ashamed, conscience-stricken and terrified, fearing Hetty's wrath and dreading what might follow.

Wherever it was that he had spent his early manhood—whether in an Abyssinian valley, like Rasselas—only that Prince always enjoyed the best of female society that could be had in the place; and it was insipid; or in the States; or in St. Petersburg, among the Occult Philosophers; or in Thibet, among the Mahatmas—it was where girls were conspicuous by their absence. He had seen these fair creatures, no doubt, at a distance—though in a monastery of Thibet a child may

grow to old age and never see a woman—and marked with wonder and admiration those sweet qualities of loveliness and grace and sweetness which youthful womanhood wears, on the outside at least. But he knew no girls while he was serving his apprenticeship until he came here. Is not this fact enough to account for the trembling which a single kiss was able to produce? A week—and he had not dared to see Hetty alone since that moment. When he looked at her, his pulse began to quicken and his hand began to tremble. When she looked, enough by itself to account for the beating of heart, the quickening of pulse, and the trembling of hand which seized him at the mere recollection of a single kiss.

Hetty was alone—upstairs. That was why he hesitated, and why his cheek glowed and his eyes softened.

Nearly a week since his fall—since the first imperfect taste of the forbidden fruit. Do not suppose that the unhappy youth did not struggle with his fate. He dared not

trust himself with Hetty even in Cicely's presence: he dreaded to meet those eyes of hers: yet if by chance he did meet them they were calm and composed as if there was nothing to be remembered. Heavens! He had kissed the girl—actually kissed her: and her eyes were as calm, as limpid as if there was no history. Had she forgotten, then? Could she forget? Alas! He was ignorant of female eyes. Had he been able to read their language they would have said to him, 'I am waiting. Come to me. Why do you delay?' He saw nothing but the outward calm, and he wondered because he was himself so troubled. In these days he slept badly; he anticipated dreadful things in dreams: his Friends in Abyssinia and elsewhere would have been pained had they known how little he regarded them.

Now then, was another chance—shall we call it another temptation? Hetty was alone.

He hesitated no longer. For an invisible rope—but oh! so strong and thick that no jack knife could cut it through—was passed

round his waist, and an invisible hand more irresistible than his own magnetic power dragged him, with burning cheeks and trembling limbs, up the stairs. Why, it was Hetty's magnetic force which dragged him: she was at the other end of the rope: she it was who drew to her feet this young man who had kissed her once and ran away from her. Common mesmerism, as Emanuel Chick would say. Yet the mesmeriser was himself mesmerised. The operator was operated upon. The subduer was subdued: Samson, the strong man, was going to Delilah to have his curls lopped.

Hetty looked up and smiled. In these cases the woman does not tremble.

‘You have come back, Paul?’ she said. ‘You have not been near me for a week. Was it my fault?’

‘Forgive me, Hetty.’ He threw himself at her feet and caught her hand. ‘Forgive me, Hetty. Oh! Hetty.’

She did not reply at first. Then she whispered, softly:

‘Oh! Paul. Why did you kiss me? You?’

He rose to his feet. Again he stood over her and they were alone. This time he did not, as before, kiss her forehead and run away. He threw his arms round her neck and kissed her lips and her cheeks, whispering brokenly :

‘Oh! Hetty. I love you, Hetty, I love you.’ That was all he had to say.

She heard him without any reply. She even made no kind of reply when he rose and kissed her on the lips, and on the brow, and on the cheeks.

‘Hetty,’ he repeated, ‘I love you.’

No music falls more sweetly on the ear of nymph ; no poetry more moves the heart than these words from the shepherd whom she has already singled out for that admiration which should precede all true love. He was great and was possessed of wonderful powers which he bore modestly ; he had lifted her soul a hundred times ; he was her Prophet ; and now he said that he loved her. Was it possible ?

‘But, oh! Paul!’ Hetty cried, presently, ‘we are foolish. You are pledged to a life of celibacy.’

‘Only the highest adepts are celibates, my dear. I renounce for your sake the highest degrees. I shall be suffered to remain on a lower plane—with you, Hetty.’

‘You would repent—the time would come when you would repent—and regret your choice. No, Paul, you must not be dragged back by a woman. You would never lift me to the higher level. I belong—I have always known it—to the lower. Cicely might rise, but I could not. Paul, leave me and—and—forget me.’

But she uttered these last words with so much reluctance that all the more they fired the young and ardent lover. Indeed, there was no coquetry in Hetty. It was her heart that spoke in this reluctance to let him go.

‘I will never leave you, Hetty. For your sake I would willingly abandon—yes, I would abandon’—he remembered the monition of his Master—‘even my Powers.’

‘For my sake? Oh, Paul! For my sake? But you would never abandon your Wisdom. You could always teach me, whether you could converse with your friends or not—even if you ceased to talk with the spirits of the dead.’

‘If I lost my Powers,’ he said, ‘I should lose my—— I should lose you, Hetty, because——’ He meant to say, because he would have no means of subsistence at all. But he could not say this.

‘Whatever you lost, Paul, you would not lose me—if you desired to keep me.’

‘Without my Powers, I should be a beggar indeed. Other men have a profession—or ambitions. I should have none. Yet if I love you—now I understand—while I love you—for the last week my mind has been full of you—I could do little. My Powers are failing.’

‘Paul, you don’t understand,’ said Hetty. ‘I do not love you because you have this wonderful gift. Without it you would be always the same Paul to me. It is you—

yourself—not you clothed with a magician's robe that I love.'

'Hetty—how can you love me?'

'Nay, Paul, it is I who must ask that question. Who am I that you should love me? I am poor, and I am not clever. I am not a lady, even by birth. My mother is a Medium—oh! how the world despises a Medium!—and my father was once a clerk. What he is now I know not, or where he is.'

'I love you, because you are the most beautiful girl in the world, and the best. I love you because you are Hetty.'

'Oh! can it be? I thought no one would ever love me. I thought it was impossible.'

'Impossible? Oh, Hetty! Impossible for anybody to love you!'

Hetty sighed—a deep and happy sigh.

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'Tell me some day, when you please, Paul, about yourself. Tell me all that is in your mind—oh! if you love me, let me share your ambitions and learn your desires.'

‘I will tell you—everything, Hetty—everything—but not now. There are things which I must keep hidden while I am here. Afterwards—but what will happen afterwards? I know not what will happen.’

‘While you are here? But—Paul—you are not going away.’

He turned his head and answered with evasion.

‘I cannot stay here always. I am, to begin with, only a guest, though I have been allowed to feel myself a son of the house.’

‘But where will you go? Paul, will your Friends take you away suddenly and mysteriously—so that we shall not know where you are?’

‘It may be so, Hetty.’ But he did not raise his eyes. ‘I know not. To-morrow evening—I tell this to you alone, Hetty—I have to restore to Sibyl and Cicely and Tom the fortunes they so nearly lost. When that is done my work here is done. I have delivered my Message. I have put Mr.

Brudene! in the path that leads to the Ancient Wisdom. I have cleared the place of low and deceitful spirits. I must go if I am called.'

'Without me, Paul?'

He laid his head upon her shoulder. It is a feminine thing to do, but this young man had these feminine ways. He laid his head upon her shoulder, and Hetty's heart glowed within her to think that her lover leaned upon her. It was an omen and a sign. He would tell her everything. She would be his confidante as well as his mistress and his wife.

'Hetty, how can I go without you? And yet—oh!' he sprang to his feet and threw out his arms. 'Let it all go—I care nothing—Hetty, it will be hard to live without you. I know now what I have wanted all this time. It was a woman to confide in and give me sympathy. I have had no sympathy, Hetty. I have not known any girls since—since—it is some years since I saw her last. She used to listen to me.'

‘Were you in love with her, Paul?’
Hetty did not ask who she was.

‘No—we were like brother and sister. You will be to me more—far more—than she could be. Hetty, I understand now, better than I did, even my own teaching. I understand the love of the Spirits for each other. They are never divided and they never weary of each other’s company. And yet the things that I have told you seem to have been empty words.’

‘Oh! no, Paul. They were beautiful words. They have opened our hearts, Paul, and filled our minds with great thoughts. But, Paul,’ she came back to the old question, ‘you will not go without me?’

‘My dear—if I must.’

‘Where will you go? When will you come back? How shall I live without you?’

‘I don’t know, Hetty. Must I make you suffer, I am sorry that I told you——’

‘No, Paul, I would rather suffer anything than lose the memory of this day. Tell me again. Let me have it once more from your

lips. Do you love me, Paul? Is it true? Is it really true?’

‘True? Oh! Hetty, if you only knew how true it was—and is——’

‘Yet you will go?’

‘I must, my dear; if one must.——’

‘I do not believe it. There is no must. Who is to make you go? Your Friends? I do not believe that there is anything your Friends can make you do unless you choose to do it. Are you not a free man? What is the good of your Hidden Knowledge if you are not free? Can you not make your own path for yourself? Then what is the good of your Wisdom?’

‘Sometimes, Hetty, I ask myself that very same question. Sometimes it seems to me as if it were better to be an ordinary man—just like the rest of mankind—with no more power and no more knowledge.’

‘Yet, before you loved me, Paul, I thought how wonderful it was. Since you have loved me I care nothing about it at all. What matters for all the Ancient Wisdom? It could

not make you love me more. Then what do I care for it? If it is to take you away from me I shall hate it—I shall hate it.’

‘Hetty!’

‘Oh! Paul, when you told me that you loved me you drew my heart out of myself. It is all yours. I have no other hope, no other life, but for you. If you go away, what have I left? What shall I do? Will your Friends make you do this cruel thing? I am only a girl and they are great philosophers who despise girls and love; but they cannot make you do so cruel a thing as to desert me, Paul, can they? If they can, rise up and desert them. What is Wisdom compared with Love? Oh, what can Wisdom do for you compared with what Love can do? My dear—my Paul——’ She threw her arms round his neck.

‘My Paul, if I can make you happy, stay. It is better to be happy than to be wise. Everybody longs for Love. Oh, I know why I have been so discontented and so unhappy. It is because I had no one to love me. Since

your lips touched my forehead I have been in happy heaven; I have said to myself all day long and every night, 'He loved me. Paul loves me; he loves me. Thank God! Now nothing can befall to make me unhappy any more. If he dies he will love me still; if he lives I shall only live, too, that he may be happy.' But oh, Paul, I never thought—I never thought—you could be taken away.'

'Hetty!'

'You *shall* not go, Paul!' She held him with all her strength of arm, and more—with the strength of her eyes. 'I cannot bear it. I will not bear it; you must not go, though they drag you through the air. You shall not go without me.'

'Hetty, I must tell you, I cannot help telling you.' He who tells his secret to his sweetheart is not necessarily lost: he only binds another chain upon himself. 'My great gift, which I have, I do believe, above all other men, is the power by which I made Cicely see her brother at sea, and by which I could subdue your will so that at a look or

a gesture you became, without knowing it, my obedient servant. By the same Power I rule Lady Augusta; Sibyl is outside my Power, and so is Tom. It is by my gift that I am enabled to convey the messages of my Friends, and to enforce respect for the teaching of the Hidden Wisdom.'

'Yes, Paul, I know that power.'

'I have been warned, Hetty, by one who knows. I have been warned again and again, that if I suffered a woman to fill my thoughts I should lose that power. Those who have it must keep their hearts free from love, from enmity, from hatred, and from every absorbing passion. But the most fatal of all is Love. My dear, for weeks the thought of you has been gradually stealing over my heart and mastering me. I can think of nothing else. I fear I have lost my Power.'

'Why, then, Paul, you will be no more than an ordinary man in love with an ordinary girl. The common lot will be ours.'

'Yesterday,' said Paul, apparently not much comforted by this assurance, 'I tried

as usual with Mr. Brudenel. He only stared at me and began to fuss about the money which he thinks he has lost. I could not move him. Then I tried with Cicely. She laughed and chattered. I could not move her. And then I tried with Lady Augusta and she did not even know that I was exerting all my will to move her. Hetty, let me try once more. Sit as you used to sit—so. Fold your hands, hold up your face—look me full in the eyes. Oh! Hetty,’ he stooped to kiss her, ‘no woman in the world has such beautiful eyes. So—now.’

She obeyed him. After five minutes he stopped. ‘Oh!’ he cried, ‘I feel that it is useless.’

‘Paul, I cannot help it. Your eyes have lost their old look. They have a much sweeter look. The authority has gone out of them.’

‘Yes,’ he groaned, ‘the authority has gone. Perhaps, when I go away, it will return.’

‘I hope it will never return,’ said Hetty. No, Paul, no. If you wish it, you shall have

your power again. What are your Friends worth if they cannot give it back to you?’

‘My dear, you do not know what you are saying. If I have thrown away my Power, I shall never get it again—never—never. Without it I can do nothing. Think of all the things that I have done, and remember that without the Power I could have done none of these.’

‘My dear, you have done these things once. What need to do them again?’

‘Hetty, can you not understand? What am I worth without this gift? It was mine—my own—and I have lost it.’

‘You have lost it through love—through me. Leave off loving me, Paul, and it will come back, and I shall have the recollection.’

She burst into tears and Paul, carried out of himself, soothed and caressed her.

‘My dear,’ he said, ‘I will never leave you. Come what may, you are mine and I am yours. Oh! Hetty,’ he laughed aloud, ‘you do not know what you have done in

making me love you. Everything is changed. All that Lady Augusta has at heart is destroyed. There will be no more progress in the Ancient Way; there will be no more instruction for Mr. Brudenel; there will be no more miracles, after to-morrow. It is shattered—the most wonderful, the most perfect creation—and there is nothing left for us but to walk the earth like common folk, hand-in-hand, with no help at all from my mysterious Friends, and no communications with the spirits. Will you be happy still, love?’

‘Yes, Paul, I ask no better than the common lot.’

‘Then be happy, dear. I must tell you more—some day—but now be happy, Hetty, if this contents you.’

‘Paul,’ she whispered, ‘if this mysterious power has gone you can never be a Medium. You can never pretend and invent and stoop to play tricks for money. Oh! I would work for you night and day, Paul—there is nothing that I would not do for you, to save you from

becoming a Medium. Oh, but you could not. You are too wise and too high-minded. The loss of your Power will not touch your Wisdom. You have still your lofty mind. Paul, when it is gone you will be better than before.'

Paul dropped his eyes and changed colour. This remarkable young man received both praise and blame with equal signs of shame. Sir Percival called him hard names which wounded and hurt him; Hetty called him wise and noble, and this seemed to hurt him even more.

'Hetty—you must not. Oh! my dear—you must not. I am not wise—or noble—or anything.'

'Yes, Paul, to me you will always be wise and noble, and all the better for losing the power which separated you from the rest of the world. All the better, Paul.'

Did the lady of Philistia comfort Samson, after the job was done, with the assurance that, though his strength was gone, he looked much neater and trimmer and better suited

for moving in general society than in his previously dishevelled long-curled condition?

At luncheon that day Paul did not appear.

‘Perhaps,’ said Lady Augusta, ‘he is away in the spirit.’

‘Perhaps,’ said Tom.

‘No message has come to me in my study,’ said Mr. Brudenel. ‘My dear, therefore, I confess that I am—yes—I really am—uneasy.’ He looked uneasy. He was so nervous that he could hardly sit in his chair. He drummed with his fingers and he played with his knife and fork.

Sibyl glanced at Tom, but said nothing.

‘My dear,’ said Lady Augusta, ‘take your lunch, all will be well.’

‘I cannot eat.’ Mr. Brudenel drank a glass of sherry, pushed back his chair, and rushed out of the room.

‘As for me,’ said Tom, ‘I am extremely hungry. Mr. Brudenel will be all right to-morrow.’

‘Only let us have patience and Faith,’

said Cicely. ‘Something has happened to Paul. He stood over me yesterday and I felt nothing. Something has gone out of him. One of the servants might have been standing over me. But it will all come right. Let us have Faith in Paul.’

Whatever had happened, Paul was seen no more that day. At eleven o’clock in the evening he returned, looking pale and troubled, and he went straight to his own room.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FORENOON.

AND then the birthday came.

On this day, by the wills of their respective parents, both cousins, the one, Tom, being four-and-twenty, and the other, Cicely, twenty-one, arrived at their majority, and should inherit their fortunes—if, that is to say, Messrs. Izák Ibn Menelek, Rupert P. Zeigler and Surabjee Kamsetjee should be good enough to meet the expectations of their young friend and disciple, and restore the money now in their keeping.

The first to come down stairs that morning was Tom. Paul followed next. The former preserved his usual cheerfulness, despite the anxieties of the situation.

‘I wish you many happy returns of the

day,' said Paul. 'It is your birthday, is it not?'

'Thank you. Yes, it is my birthday. As nothing else has been thought of, or talked about, for the last three weeks, I am quite sure that it is my birthday. And it shows how wrapt you have been in meditation not to know that it is a very important birthday for me. How would it be if the Philosophers, your friends, were able to abolish a man's birthday?'

Paul smiled, but mechanically.

'Yes,' Tom continued; 'it is my birthday, and Cicely's as well. And with your help, my Philosopher, and a miracle or two, which I have no doubt will be accomplished by the Sages, your Friends, I hope to be put in the way of enjoying two or three birthdays more. Otherwise, indeed——'

'Otherwise?'

There was a gleam of menace in Tom's eyes. 'Otherwise, Tom?'

'Otherwise means,' Tom answered, lightly, 'that if these miracles do not come along in due course, the Ancient Wisdom will have to

wake up in an astonishing way. But what's the matter, Paul? You look uncommon flabby.'

Black Care, Anxiety, Trouble, sat visibly upon Paul's brow. Tom secretly connected the thing with the three cheques, but he was wrong. Those cheques had never caused Paul the least anxiety.

'Nothing is the matter except headache.'

'A week or two ago you cured Sibyl's maid of a toothache. Physician, cure thyself.'

'I can't, Tom. This is a headache which cannot be exorcised.'

'I'm sorry—especially because I've got to say something devilish unpleasant.'

'What is that? Say it. You will not make my head ache any worse.'

'Do you remember, Paul, how I told you at the beginning; the very first night that you came, in my workshop, the night you rang the bells, that I was going to watch you?'

'Did you say so?' Paul replied, carelessly.
'Perhaps you did. Yes, I remember now.'

You did say something to that effect. We were to be on good terms, but you were going to keep your eyes on me. I remember. Well, Tom, your eyes have been on me, have they, all the time?’

‘All the time.’

‘And what have you discovered?’

‘I have been watching all the time,’ Tom repeated, gravely.

‘Have you?’ Paul looked up curiously. ‘Communicate your discoveries.’

‘They are somewhat important. For instance, there was the little business with Mr. James Berry. Do you remember Mr. James Berry?’

‘The man whom Lavinia Medlock asked me to advise? Yes, what of him? I gave him advice. I remember that he asked me whether he was to retain certain shares in a certain company, or sell them out. I advised him to sell them out. Did he do so?’

‘What company was it?’

‘He did not tell me the name of the company. It would have been no use to me

if he had told me. I remember Lavinia Medlock told me that if certain things happened the old gentleman would have to go to the workhouse. Why not go to the workhouse? They get food and warmth in the workhouse, and can meditate. But this old gentleman somehow did not wish to go there, and I advised him to avoid that necessity.'

'Did you see that old gentleman?'

'No. Does he say that he saw me?'

'Did you not learn from Lavinia the name of that company?'

'Lavinia told me she did not know it.'

Tom was silenced. In fact, both Mr. Berry, whom he had seen, and Lavinia whom he had questioned, declared that Herr Paulus knew no more than was conveyed in a certain question. 'Shall the inquirer—name unknown—sell out certain shares—company unknown—or keep them?'

'Well,' he said, feeling baffled, 'it is odd that the company should be Brudenel and Company, and that Mr. Brudenel's shares

should have been sold out at the same time. I say, Paul, that is an odd coincidence.'

'Perhaps. I did not make the world and I do not rule it. Why worry me with odd coincidences? Tell Mr. Brudenel about them if you like.'

His words showed irritation. And I do not know what Tom would have replied, because at this moment Sibyl came in, with Cicely, followed by Lady Augusta. Last appeared Mr. Cyrus Brudenel himself; he was terribly anxious; his face was pale and his fingers kept catching at his watch-chain. He was what young men call jumpy. 'Tom,' he cried with a miserable attempt at heartiness, 'I wish you many happy returns of the day, and joy—j—j—joy—of your inheritance—when you get it. Cicely, my dear,' he kissed the blind girl with tenderness, 'you are now your own mistress—at least—I—I—I—can only say, my dear, that I have done my best for you, and that I hope all will turn out well. You have given me so much happiness, Cicely, by living with us, but we hope you will stay

on with us. You are of age both of you. You have now—that is—I hope that you are coming into your fortunes. Many strange things have happened in this house ; none so strange as the temporary—I trust, only temporary—vanishing of your fortunes. But we have Faith—we have complete Faith.’

His jerky manner scarcely conveyed an impression of complete Faith. Everybody looked at Paul. On a former occasion when everybody looked at Paul, he carried himself with a perfect disregard of the general curiosity and was absorbed in his breakfast. On this occasion, perhaps because they had not yet sat down to that meal, he showed himself conscious of their eyes, and blushed and hung his head. What had happened to him ?

‘Paul !’ cried Lady Augusta. ‘Speak, I implore you. Bring us hope and comfort.’

‘I do not know for certain,’ said Paul, slowly and with hesitation. Again, what had happened to change Paul’s bearing of authority into this manner of hesitation ? ‘I have

said all along that I could not know for certain. How can I tell whether they will regard a mere money matter worthy of interference? Yet as they have already interfered, it seems reasonable to suppose that they had some motive which could not be otherwise than benevolent to this household. Let us wait in patience and Faith.'

'Let us have Faith,' said Cicely. But Mr. Brudenel groaned audibly.

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Tom and Sibyl, when the others separated after breakfast, remained in the breakfast room.

'Let us have faith,' said Tom, derisively. 'Yes, perhaps, that is all we shall hear, Dodo, dear. Let us consider——'

'You will expose him, Tom.'

'I can certainly testify as to certain things that I have seen. The difficulty is how far my testimony will go. You see, your father wrote letters of introduction and recommendation for the three persons to whose order

he made out the cheques. Suppose he is asked why he wrote those letters : suppose he says he does not know. In that case, your father will look—shall we say?—simple. Suppose he is asked why he sold out the shares and replies that he does not remember—he will, again, present—shall we say?—a simple appearance. Suppose he is asked why he drew those cheques——’

‘But, Tom, you can always prove that this man worked upon him.’

‘I don’t know. There is no precedent in law, I am afraid, of one man being “worked upon” by another. What can I prove, Dodo?’ he added, gloomily. ‘I begin to fear the worst. I don’t like his looks. For the first time since he came here, he looks guilty. I don’t like it.’

‘Are we to lose everything, Tom?’

‘Not if I can help it. Perhaps we shall be able to show cause for an inquiry. We might get an injunction—but for what reason? Suppose these perfectly unknown persons each draw a cheque payable to “Herr Paulus

or bearer," or to "No. 191 or bearer"—how can we do anything? We cannot find these men.'

'You thought you knew them.'

'I believe I do. But how to prove it? Dodo, dear, it is possible that we shall lose our little all despite the fuss that our friend made over it. And yet it can't be. Until this morning I thought one had only to look in his face——'

'Tom, men always think that good looks must cover a good heart.'

'With girls I am sure they do. That is, looks like yours, Dodo.'

Mr. Brudenel sat in his studio expecting Paul. He had pictured to himself, in hopeful moments, a beautiful scene. His wards' fortunes would be given back to him, and he would convey them magnificently to their rightful owners with a speech about the advantages of securing friends able to interpose in times of danger and to avert wreck and ruin. He liked to make up little speeches beforehand, so as to be always equal

to the occasion ; but as things never came off as he expected, these little speeches were always thrown away. Thus is man mocked of Fate.

Paul came not. Then Mr. Brudenel began to think that the expected Message might come to him directly, without the presence of Paul, and he composed himself, sitting upright in his wooden chair—not the low leather chair by the fire. Presently he should glide insensibly into that attitude of mind when the outer world becomes unseen, unheard and unregarded, and the soul is independent of the body and can fly whither she please and space and time no longer have any meaning. When Paul stood over him and looked in his face and commanded him to yield up his soul to the influence of those who called, he felt instantly as a tired man feels when he lays his head upon the pillow. His limbs became motionless ; he felt them no longer. A kind of sleep rose upward to his brain and set free his soul. Now, he thought, he would induce that semblance of

sleep without the aid of Paul. Nothing would be easier.

Strange to say, after five minutes of intense exercise, with the will resolutely bent, he discovered that no progress at all had been made. Worse than that, he was becoming fidgety; his feet refused to stay still; his legs kicked involuntarily; his fingers twitched; he was awake all over.

He gave himself another five minutes. The result left no room at all for doubt. He was not permitted to release his soul—he could not, therefore, go in quest of any message; because you cannot, yet, lug a lump of bones and flesh all the way to Abyssinia and back in a morning.

Then he tried another method. He arose and solemnly called aloud:—

‘Izák Ibn Menelek!’

The quiet room echoed his words, but there came no answer.

‘Izák Ibn Menelek! Master! Hear!’

The Master may have heard, but he made no reply.

A third time Mr. Brudenel called—

‘Izák Ibn Menelek! Come!’

He sat down and waited for an answer. Perhaps the Master was asleep; perhaps he was walking.

Mr. Brudenel waited for a quarter of an hour, concentrating his mind, with all the force of which he was capable, upon the Master. So the prophets of Baal in the slopes of Carmel called all day long and hacked their flesh with knives to please their god. But no answer came, and presently those prophets were taken to the side of the stream and done to death. But to the end, I am sure, they believed profoundly.

There came no answer, no voice faint and far-off such as called him when Paul was present.

Then Mr. Brudenel—always ready to fall away from faith—sat down in despair. He was deserted. His new Friends had deserted him, and he had thrown away the old Friends. Emanuel Chick’s spirits would not have failed him even though they might bring no

comfort. Lavinia's spirits might have told him things irrelevant and trivial, but they would not have heard him call upon them in silence. The busts of his former friends—Albertus Magnus, Paracelsus, Roger Bacon, Dee, Lilly, Mesmer, Home—and the rest frowned upon him from their places above the bookshelves. The books themselves, whose outside he had been wont to admire, the acquisition of which had cost him such mighty sums, frowned upon him and threatened him. He had deserted his old Friends; he had turned out of the house the old spirits whom he had formerly entertained. He had gone over to a new party, and what had he got for it?

Then a devil—I think it may have been one of Lavinia's mocking spirits—whispered in his ear, 'If they have done so much to you they may do more. You know that it was not you yourself who wrote those letters and signed those cheques, though they are in your handwriting. The power which imitated your handwriting can do more. Nay, it may

even personate you yourself. It can make you say, and write, and do anything it pleases. Already it has robbed you of thirty-five thousand pounds.' How Mr. Brudenel wiped his brow and shivered. The mocking devil went on: 'You have indeed brought your pigs to a pretty market. If you rebel they may punish you by taking away your land. Why, in either case you are done for, because, if you do not rebel, but go on in the course you have begun, they will certainly strip you of all your possessions. Is not the foundation of their philosophy the maxim that wealth is contemptible? Live like Epictetus in a cottage on herbs and onions—live like Diogenes, in a tub—go about with a wallet, begging crusts, like a Buddhist Saint or a Franciscan—go in rags, unwashed, unshaven, beaten by the wind and rained upon, if you would please your new friends.'

Mr. Brudenel heard these words plainly spoken in his ear—very strange things, I have many times stated, went on in that house. But it is not too much to say that they scared

him. The contemplation of philosophy reduced to practice filled him with horror. Would Lady Augusta also be deprived of her property? Would they go about together, meditating on the Higher Planes, and begging for crusts to put in their wallets? He pictured himself, being a person of some imagination, as the Sage after the heart of the Abyssinian wise man—he would wear a frock coat once black, but now gone green, with ragged tails, with holes in the elbows and a shimmering sheen of grease or age upon the wrists—he would have a tall hat with a broken brim, for as a new Lincoln and Bennett is an outward sign of respectability, so a tall hat, ancient, shabby, and worn is a sure and certain proof of poverty—his boots would be broken down and gaping—he would have a red comforter round his neck, and no collar—his nose would be blue with the cold—his white beard would be as venerable as that of Belisarius in his most penurious condition. He tried to picture Lady Augusta meditating beside him on the same Exalted Plane. But

here he broke down. Nobody could imagine Lady Augusta in rags, revelling in these heights of philosophy.

The longer he thought upon this dreadful possibility the more probable did it seem. Yes, Paul—but Paul was clad in fine raiment and fared sumptuously, and seemed to enjoy the good things of the world prodigiously, as all young men should—Paul preached perpetually the doctrine of the nothingness of wealth: he despised wealth: his Friends despised wealth: the loss of wealth was an incident not worth mentioning. Yet Mr. Brudenel thought how would Paul look in rags, and with a blue nose, carrying a basket to hold the broken meats of charity?

The thing was dreadful, yet it was possible: it was even likely. Had he not accepted with more than submission—with ardour—all these teachings? Had he not already gone a long way down the Ancient Way, only somehow he forgot what the scenery was like? How could he complain if he was taken at his word and deprived of

that earthly dross which stands between vanity and wisdom, so that one may not pass from the glittering realms of the one to the fair fields of the other without dropping the burden and weight of wealth, even as the Pilgrim dropped the load which bound him down? He would be taken at his word. His new Friends would strip him of the wealth which he could not bring himself to despise. When his wealth was gone he would be able to start fair upon the way of wisdom. Great and signal and generous as was the gift of poverty which his new Friends could confer upon him, Mr. Brudenel was not happy at the prospect. On the contrary, he groaned: he paced the room anxiously: he tossed his arms: he sat down and got up again. He was in an agony of terror, and it lasted all the day.

CHAPTER XIX.

STILL THE FORENOON.

PAUL was otherwise engaged. At eleven o'clock, while Mr. Brudenel, having failed in his attempt to transport himself to Abyssinia, was yielding a willing ear to the whispers of that devil, he went to Cicely's room. Not this time with burning cheeks and glowing eyes, but with hanging head. He went heavily. All this day he went heavily.

All four ladies were sitting there.

'Is there any message, Paul?' cried Lady Augusta, springing to her feet.

'None,' he replied. 'But have patience.'

'What is the matter, Paul?' she asked. 'You look frightfully ill.'

Hetty looked as if she would have asked that question, had she dared.

'I am not very well, I think. I have

gone through a great struggle, dear Lady Augusta. But I am perfectly satisfied with the result.' Hetty blushed, and bent back her head over the work in her hand. 'But it has been a struggle. This is an anxious day for me on your account, and there is an anxious time before me.' He looked at his watch. 'I want a moment with you, Hetty,' he said, quietly. 'Oh, not alone. Do not let anybody move.'

They sat envious of Hetty. That is to say, two of them were envious of the distinction. Sibyl, for her part, affected indifference. But she was curious. Nothing that this enemy of hers did was indifferent to her.

'Hetty, it is eighteen years since your father left you. It is so long that you can scarcely remember him. I believe you have never heard anything of him since he went away.'

'No. My mother has never had a line from him. She believes that he must be dead.'

‘He is not dead, Hetty.’

‘How do you know, Paul?’

Only a week ago he would have replied by a reference to his Friends. Now he made answer truthfully :

‘Chance has brought me that knowledge, Hetty.’

‘He calls it chance,’ Cicely murmured, ‘as if, with him, there could be such a thing as chance.’

‘I have not only found out that he is living ; I have also arranged that he should call here this morning.’

‘Oh ! Paul. My father?’

‘Oh ! Hetty !’ cried Cicely, ‘your father !’

‘He does not know that he is to come and see his own daughter. He will bring a letter. Then——’

At that moment a letter was brought. On the envelope was the address only, and in the corner the words, ‘From the Professor.’

‘Hetty, your father is below.’ She sprang to her feet. ‘Will you see him?’

‘Will I see him ? Oh ! Paul ! You have

done this for me. But — Paul — does my mother know?’

‘Not yet.’

‘What is he like, Paul? Oh! what is my father like? What will he say to me? What shall I say to him?’ She stood irresolute and pale; glad, yet terrified.

‘Do not expect too much, Hetty. Remember that he has been separated from you since you were a child. Perhaps he hardly remembers your existence. You know nothing about his past life—what he has done, or how he has lived. It may be a career of distinction, or it may be a very humble history. He may be rich, he may be poor; he may be in rags, or he may drive in his carriage. If he were a rich man he would probably have returned home before now. Would you like to see him?’

Paul looked at his watch again. ‘Decide at once, Hetty.’

‘I do not remember him at all. Of course I should like to see him. Oh! Paul,’

she repeated, 'it is you—you—who have brought my father home.'

There was something in her voice which made Sibyl look at her with meaning eyes. But she said nothing. Did her own experience cause her to recognise the accent of love? King Cupid hath a very sweet and tender voice, which he lendeth to his worshippers.

'With your permission, Lady Augusta, Hetty will go downstairs and find her father in the breakfast-room.'

'Go, Hetty, dear. I hope . . . Go, my dear.' Lady Augusta was going to say that she hoped Hetty would find her father everything that a daughter would wish, or words to that effect, but she remembered in time that he had been no more than a small city clerk, and she refrained. The result is generally unhappy when a city clerk is so ill-advised as to emigrate to America—a country whose people are reported as jealous to keep the whole of the national clerkery in their own hands, with all the posts and offices whose

duties can be discharged in a sitting position, and to make new comers the hewers of wood and drawers of water for them, and carriers of burdens and diggers of the ground.

Hetty obeyed and ran down the stairs, overpowered with wonder at this new miracle. But at the door of the breakfast room she stopped and trembled, comprehending the vast importance of the moment.

.

‘Let us talk, Lady Augusta,’ said Paul. ‘It will be the last time that we shall talk together as we have been wont to talk.’

‘Why the last time, Paul?’

‘I do not know. The future is dark before me. I am on the verge of some great change; what will happen next I cannot tell. Let us talk.’

Sibyl was guilty, because as she knew about the camera obscura the future seemed light. She arose, therefore, and softly left the room.

Then Paul, with the two women who believed in him, had his last talk. He knew

that would be the last discussion he would ever have with them on the things they loved to hear.

At first, he hesitated and seemed at a loss. His depression weighed him down. Presently, however, he recovered something of the old fire, and talked of the other world, and of this, and of the spirits of wise men and just men, and holy women; of their love one towards the other, and of the blessedness of walking with them on the Higher Planes, hand-in-hand, journeying upwards for ever and for ever, rising into heights of understanding and knowledge, of which we can have no conception, and for which there are no words, and as they rise, leaving behind them ever more and more of the earthly dross, until even the soul which is a sacred body, becomes converted into pure spirit after long ages of happiness beyond the power of speech to tell, and love beyond the power of human heart to feel.

‘Oh, dear ladies,’ he said, with glowing eyes and softening voice, ‘this is the vision

that came to Paul the Apostle. Eye hath not seen, nor hath ear heard these things, nor can any tongue speak them. The vision came also to Swedenborg. It hath been granted to a few women. And those who walk in the Ancient Way have glimpses as they prove themselves worthy of the soul upon her pilgrimage. Let us not speak of the soul's abode, it is here and everywhere ; let us not think, when we go alone upon the journey which seems so dark, that it is a lonely journey ; we are never separated from those we love ; nothing can separate in life or death the souls of those who are united in love and friendship, but unworthiness. The lower nature may disgust the higher, when love will perish. The higher nature will seem cold to the lower, then love will decay. But those who love are always together. Shall we walk together on those Planes ?' He gave one hand to Cicely and the other to Lady Augusta. ' This is our last conversation. My Message has been delivered. I have done what I came to do. I have no more to say.'

‘Not the last conversation, Paul, not the last,’ said Lady Augusta. ‘My dear boy, my son, my friend and teacher, you will stay with us. We shall have many more such talks. We will found the college we have so often discussed, and you shall be its first director. Do not speak of last words, Paul.’

‘Yes, I am a messenger and a servant. When the Message is delivered and the Service done the servant is dismissed. He then joins the common herd and fights his way to the Higher Planes with the rest. I have had my vision. I have communicated it to you. Oh! Lady Augusta, you know now how small a thing and how useless is your old craft of mediumship. You have risen above it, you have left it far below. You have learned the true spiritualism which can be reached in this life only by purity and meditation and separation from the joys of the world. But as for me, I have done my work and I sink back to the common herd.’

As he spoke the glow of his cheek faded, the burning light went out of his eyes, the

look of authority vanished. He became to outward show only a youth of four or five and twenty, with a comely presence and a face which proclaimed possibilities.

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In the breakfast room father and daughter stood face to face.

She saw before her a spare, undersized man, with black hair and small black eyes too close together, and dressed with a shabby respectability almost grotesque, in black, which was baggy everywhere—distinctly and at first sight, not a gentleman: not in the least resembling a gentleman: not a prosperous man, or a rich man, or a successful man either. That was apparent from the low and humble bow with which he honoured Hetty's entrance. He saw before him a young lady—distinctly a lady—young and beautiful, who looked at him with curiosity and astonishment. How could such a man, so insignificant in manner and look, have such a daughter, so tall and well-formed and so beautiful? Yet there was a resemblance.

Every face is capable of glorification and the reverse. Hetty's face was also her father's, but in the case of her father the face, originally in a mean and small form, had by a long course of a wandering, uncertain, and shifty life, become smaller and meaner, till it was quite degraded. In Hetty's case the face began with a large and noble copy of the model, and her life among gentlefolk and books and science and lofty thoughts had grown larger and nobler. Yet the same face!

‘I was told,’ he explained, ‘that I was to come to this house. I suppose that you will be able to tell me why I was to come. If it is for any job, I may explain that I am at present out of work and should be glad of any work, however temporary, having been disappointed in finding work. I have had great experience in many kinds of work, and in neatness and despatch——’

‘Are you my father?’ she interrupted.
‘My name is Medlock.’

‘Oh! Lord! Are you my daughter?’

Who'd have thought it? My daughter—you?'

'If you are the husband of Lavinia Medlock, I am certainly your daughter.'

'I forgot—I clean forgot that I had a daughter. Oh! Lord!' he became breathless. 'What a daughter for the platform! That's why I was sent here, wasn't it? to find my daughter. Your name, my dear, if I may be allowed—as a father—to use the adjective—was Belinda.'

'Certainly not.'

'No, no. I remember now. Your mother was ordered by the spirits to call you Belinda, and I wouldn't have it. We had a row about it, and the spirits kep on rappin' all night long. Hetty, you were christened. I remember now—oh! Lord!—just as if it was yesterday.'

'Yes, Hetty is my name.'

'You are my gal, then. Hetty—my daughter. There's no mistake about that. Lord! what a gal! I wish I'd known before.'

No rushing into arms: no joyful embrace; not a word of welcome. This father only put

his hat on the floor, between his legs, and sat down with his thumbs in his waistcoat arm-holes. This attitude conveyed some assertion of parental authority, but not much.

‘You’ve grown, my child, since I saw you last. To be sure, you’ve had time to grow. And you’ve made a creditable use of the time. Nobody can deny that. You are dressed like a lady. Has your mother made money, then? I heard she was poor.’

‘We are very poor. I am dressed like a lady because I am the companion of a lady.’

‘Oh! very poor. That’s a pity now, isn’t it? Lavinia just threw away her chances. It’s a great pity, isn’t it? I haven’t got any money myself either. If you want anything, I can’t give it to you. So don’t look to me.’

‘I will not,’ said Hetty, considerably discouraged.

‘I’ve been knocking about the world,’ her father went on, ‘for eighteen years, living on jobs, but mostly in the Show business. As a lecturer to a Show there are not many to equal your father, and none to beat him.’

Hetty showed no sign of admiration. Supposing you were in ignorance of your father's profession and you had to choose one for him, would you select that of Lecturer to a Show? I think not. The imagination would dwell upon the respective glories of Bishop, Judge, Statesman, General, Admiral, Orator, Singer, Actor, Author, Poet—but it would not consider those of Lecturer to a Show at all.

‘You were a clerk in the City at first, I believe,’ said Hetty. ‘To be sure, I ought not to expect too much. When will you go to see my mother?’

‘Well, my dear, the fact is—we’ve got on very well without each other so far, and now I’m only here on a flying visit—looking for Talent, in fact. Does your mother practise still?’

‘Yes, but she has very few clients. She is very poor.’

‘You can tell her,’ said Mr. Medlock with deep feeling, ‘that I could not go back and be a burden upon her. When I am rich—I

always intended that—I shall send her money. For the present it's low water, and I should be truly sorry for her to think that I only came home in order to sponge upon her. Have you got any Talent yourself?'

'What for?'

'In your mother's line, for instance?'

'No, no, NO,' Hetty replied with the greatest decision.

'It's a pity, because with such looks as yours there would be money in it—money—and I would run you, my dear, on advantageous terms. If you've no Talent, we might fake up a bit and look the part. I know all the machinery for spirit rapping and music and all. Think it over.'

'Oh!' cried Hetty. 'Am I never to get out of the dreadful business? I see my father after eighteen years—and the first thing he does is to propose that I should become a cheat and an impostor. No—no—no. I will not.'

'Well—well.' The little man hastily took his thumbs out of his armholes and pushed

back his chair a foot or two. ‘Your temper, my dear, reminds me of your mother, but she never had your looks—never. Well—if you won’t, you won’t. And talk of cheating! Why, the whole world pretends. What’s any show but pretence? We dress up the giants to look taller than they are, and the dwarfs to look shorter. We put a little man by the side of the giant on the platform to show how big he is, and a big man by the side of the dwarf to show how little he is. It’s all pretence and sham, my dear, and the people like it.’ The Aged Philosopher of Beaumont Street could not have spoken more wisely. ‘Well, if you won’t—of course. Who are the people of this house?’

‘This house belongs to Mr. Cyrus Brudenel.’

‘Cyrus Brudenel? Cyrus Brudenel? What? the great Spiritualist?’

‘Yes.’

‘Cyrus Brudenel! I’ve heard of him, Hetty’—he dropped his voice—‘is there an opening?’

‘What?’

‘Is there an opening? He’s always receiving American Spiritualists. Suppose I bring him one? Do you think you can make an opening?’

‘No—No—NO.’

She was so fierce that he pushed his chair as far back as it would go.

‘Well, don’t fly in a man’s face. I only asked.’

‘Have you anything more to say to me?’ said his daughter. ‘Oh! to see your father after all these years.’ She sat down and burst into tears. ‘It’s shameful. It’s horrible. And to find that all he thinks about is to make money by cheating. I don’t want to see you again. I am sorry you came. You have made me sick and sorry. Oh! to think that while my mother—poor dear!—has to drag on her miserable spirit rapping, my father should want to drag me into a worse business still, where it is all pretence and cheating. If you have no more to say’—she

got up again and composed herself—‘you will go, perhaps.’

Her father picked up his hat and retired without giving her the paternal blessing, and without even a word of farewell. He looked very, very insignificant as he walked across the hall. The footman allowed him to open the door without assistance. He left behind him, when he had disappeared, a most evil feeling of shame and disappointment. Hetty had found her father, and he was a person without principles, without morality, without manners—a person to be ashamed of.

Presently Paul himself came down to her and sat beside her, and kissed her and comforted her. It is a truly blessed thing in moments of discouragement to have a lover to kiss and comfort one.

‘My dear,’ he said, ‘I have seen your father. I knew what he was like. Do you forgive me for sending him here? It was I who caused it to be done. I thought that you would like to know what he is—and—has he been very terrible, dear Hetty?’

‘It is not your fault, Paul, that he is—what he is. He wanted me—oh! he actually wanted me to go away and join him in cheating. Oh, Paul, he asked me to pretend to spiritualistic powers—me—and I am engaged to you, to you, Paul!’

Paul’s cheek flamed for a moment, and his lips twitched nervously.

‘Yes, dear, yes!’ He kissed her. ‘Oh! Hetty, what matter for your father, what matter for anything, so that you love me? And now I am stripped of everything and am only a common man again.’

‘I do not understand you, Paul.’

‘Only a common man. We must forget all the past, Hetty—all—all—all—and begin again. I am eager to begin again.’

CHAPTER XX.

THE MIRACLE.

THAT day again Paul failed to appear at dinner.

His absence completed the consternation with which Mr. Brudenel regarded the situation. Never, even in the old days, when another medium after leading them to what seemed solid rock had proved another disappointment, had there been a more gloomy meal. All alike, even Cicely, in despair at the breaking down of faith, were oppressed with fearful forebodings. As for Mr. Brudenel, that Voice to which he listened in the morning was still whispering in his ears that the Sages, his new friends, would take him at his word, and make him demonstrate to the world his contempt of riches. He looked

round his well-appointed table : he thought of his house, his habits, his personal comfort, and wondered if he could bear the miseries of giving them up even for the Higher Planes. He looked at his wife—she was in crimson velvet, very gorgeous—and he wondered how she would feel at beginning the spiritual ascent in rags. He drank a glass of soft, light claret, and wondered if there was anything in the Ancient Philosophy which would replace claret. ‘The spirits,’ whispered the Voice at his ear, ‘walk hand in hand upon these Higher Planes, but they have got no claret. Suppose you have been already made to order the sale of your lands and of your houses, then you will soon know how pleasant life may be without claret or anything.’ Oh, Lord ! without anything !

Thus this Voice—assuredly one of Emanuel Chick’s neglected Spirits—whispered in Mr. Brudenel’s ear. As for Lady Augusta, she only feared that her august friend would not condescend to do so trivial a matter as the money in question. And Sibyl was firmly

persuaded that Paul at that very moment was making off with all his might, a bag of gold under either arm containing no less than seventeen thousand five hundred golden sovereigns each, weighing him down to such an extent that his Seven-Leagued Boots, with all his efforts, were barely covering three and a half leagues. Tom was gloomily asking himself whether he had made a mistake in supposing the man incapable of the lower forms of meanness. Lastly, Hetty, pale and anxious, was maddening herself with the fear that perhaps, in spite of his promises, her lover had been called away, made to go away, and reduced once more to discipline, order, and the rule of celibacy. Oh! Heaven! Think of a girl just engaged, whose lover has to take the vows of celibacy! There was once a play written on this subject by an Elizabethan or Jacobean Dramatist—Peele perhaps, or Tourneur, or I know not who. He called his Tragedy ‘Love’s Cherry Bob.’

‘Tom,’ said Mr. Brudenel, when they were left alone, ‘I fear the very worst.’

‘Well, sir,’ said Tom, ‘now you mention it, so do I.’

‘I can hardly sit still in my chair’—Mr. Brudenel bounded out of it—‘for the thought of what may happen to us all. We are in their power—completely in their power. I hardly dare to talk of it, for fear of giving them offence.’

‘One thing,’ said Tom, ‘is certain. A man cannot take five-and-thirty thousand pounds away in gold. The Bank would refuse to pay so large a sum in specie. Our friend may give us trouble, but he cannot very well bolt with the swag. Even if he drew it short—in notes—we could find it out and stop them, I suppose. Yet I don’t know. What excuse should we put forward?’

‘The land may follow the shares, Tom. What is to prevent that? Why shouldn’t they make me sign letters of authority to sell the land?’

‘And then,’ Tom continued, ‘it may be difficult to fix on him alone the three separate accounts in the three banks. And it is un-

doubtedly awkward that you did give a personal introduction and reference for each of those three gentlemen.'

'What may be done with the land and the shares,' said Mr. Brudenel, pursuing his own line, 'may also be done with this very house—with everything—everything. Good Heavens! We are powerless—we may be reduced in a moment to absolute indigence! Was there ever a man so powerless?'

'We might employ a detective.'

'A detective! What good are all the detectives in the world when you come to such work as this? Can a detective watch a spirit which is invisible, yet has control over matter?'

'I think, sir,' said Tom, 'that we are talking of different things. I want to procure, if I can by any means, that money of Cicely's and of mine which is now lying to the credit of three gentlemen difficult of access.'

'And I am thinking that if the money goes, the whole of my fortune—all I have, may go after it in the same way. How do I

know what I have signed besides those cheques? Have I given authority to sell my land? Have I already parted with my house and my library? What do I know? Because, Tom, this is the strangest thing of all, that I have never been able to remember when and for what motive I sold those shares; when or why I signed those cheques; when or why I wrote those letters of recommendation for three persons—no doubt of exalted character.’—Mr. Brudenel looked round the room so as to give these spirits, if they were listening, the assurance of his profound consideration—‘seeing I have only met one of them in the valleys of Abyssinia, and I have never heard of the other two. Oh! I know that the fact cannot be disputed. The letters and cheques are all in my handwriting.’

‘It is a deuced awkward thing,’ said Tom, ‘because, as you say, you may have been trapped into writing or signing anything. Paul must have great powers.’

‘Paul? Paul had nothing to do with it.’

Paul is only a messenger. You might as well suppose that Paul found out the Company was shaky. Poor Paul! with as much knowledge of business as the housemaid.'

'Well, sir, it seems like advising you to lock the stable door when the horse is stolen; but would it not be worth while to sever the connection?

'What?'

'Why not bid farewell to the Ancient Philosophy, even if you do have to go back to the modern Medium?'

'Tom, do not scoff.'

'I am not scoffing. I am quite serious when I say that if I were you I would postpone the Higher Plane till I got into the next world.'

'I have, I confess,' said Mr. Brudenel, 'thought of that, I have thought of asking permission, through Paul, to resign. I would resign. My only fear is that I have gone too far, and, being saturated with their teaching, I may not be permitted to resign.'

'I would try if I were you,' said Tom,

with the least possible ridicule visible in his eyes.

‘I may be considered as committed to the School. If so, I confess that should the Philosophers—as I hope and trust they will not do,’—he raised his voice so that there might be no mistake in the mind of Maître Izák, should that wise man be in the room,—‘should they, I say, choose to deprive me of my fortune, it will only be in accordance with their precepts. Perhaps it may be taken into account that I am independent of fortune—I want to make no more money ; that I am an elderly man of fixed habits which it would be difficult to alter ; I want, I really want, my little comforts ; and in this cold climate a man cannot sit on a stile wrapped in a sheepskin, and meditate. The misery of the ascetic life would destroy the power of meditation, Tom. It would make the Higher Plane impossible. We are not in the East ; I cannot go about with nothing on ; I should look a fool if I attempted it—and so would Lady Augusta. Tom, in the West, a man may

be a Philosopher, but he must be respectable.'

'Why, yes,' said Tom, 'the Fakir business does not become a frock coat. Fancy St. Simeon Stylites in a tall hat! But there is another way out of it. Consider—may not Paul himself be a colossal Humbug?'

'No, Tom—no. Certainly not. That is impossible.'

'Consider, sir, you have had many disappointments before. There have been many others in whom, at the time, you firmly believed. Yet they turned out impostors, and cheated you of your money as well as your time. You have yourself often said that the ease with which trickery can be accomplished is the greatest drawback to Spiritual Research——'

'That is quite true. I have said it and experienced it. Heaven knows, often enough.'

'Then, sir, if one, why not the other?'

'No,' said Mr. Brudenel, firmly, 'not Paul. Any other. But not Paul.'

'Well, sir,' Tom insisted earnestly, 'if I

were to bring you proofs—proofs that could not be denied that Paul might be—like any other, would you listen?’

‘Tom—Tom,’ said Mr. Brudenel, with the smile of superior knowledge. ‘You do not know; you speak out of ignorance. I could not waste time even in listening to your suspicions.’

‘In that case,’ Tom sighed in resignation, ‘let us go into the drawing-room.’

It was then about a quarter past nine. The four ladies, who generally presented the appearance of cheerfulness, if not always of animation, were sitting in silence: nobody played: nobody talked: nobody sung: nobody laughed. It was a gloomy continuation of the gloomy dinner: the melancholy close of an anxious day. And everybody listened for a footstep which still delayed. As for Sibyl, she was in that frame of mind which impels a person, especially a Cassandra, to spring up before the multitude and cry aloud, ‘There! I told you so! . All along I told you so!’ Cassandra was a melancholy

person at all times — misunderstood, disbelieved, mocked, and extremely unpopular. But there were moments when she had her triumphs, as for example, when she stood beside the burning Palace while the Greeks were hurrying upon their prey, and called aloud to Hecuba and her sisters and the shrieking handmaidens, ‘There! I told you so! All along I told you so!’

Mr. Brudenel took a chair beside his wife and sighed profoundly. No one ventured a word of consolation or of hope. The situation was past both consolation and hope. Tom stood outside the ring and fidgeted. Something was on his mind: something beyond the cause of the general depression, and it was as if he was uncertain how to open the subject.

Sibyl perceived it and kindly gave him the opening.

‘You had something to tell us, Tom,’ she said. ‘Something important about Herr Paulus.’

She said this so softly and with such sweetness of manner that everybody perceived

at once that something disagreeable was coming.

‘Is this a time, Tom,’ said Lady Augusta, ‘for telling us that you do not believe in supernatural forces?’

‘It is a question of perfectly natural forces,’ Tom replied. ‘Shall I tell you a little story of how a man who pretended to do miraculous things was watched, and how his pretensions were proved to be based on tricks? It is really an interesting story, and has a peculiar fitness on an evening like the present.’

‘If you mean Paul,’ said Cicely, ‘you had better tell your story, and then we can ask Paul himself to prove that it is not true.’

‘Very well,’ said Tom, ‘it is about Paul. But perhaps, sir, you object to hear the story.’

‘I said I would not waste time in sifting so-called proofs. But tell us what you please—tell us—ah!’—Mr. Brudenel sighed again—‘tell us what you please.’

‘I am only going to give you the result of

certain investigations and experiments I have been conducting. From the beginning I mistrusted Paul, as I should mistrust any man who starts with the pretence of having supernatural powers. Personally, I liked him, as you know. I thought he was a pretender, but of an order quite superior to the common run. I warned him that I should watch, and he laughed. Well, I have watched, and I have been rewarded by the full discovery of how it has been done.'

'That is very curious and interesting.'

Everybody jumped, because no one had observed Paul's entrance. Yet there was no pretence at magical appearance. He simply opened the door and stepped into the room. To be sure he was always noiseless and the carpets were thick.

'The discovery of how it was done,' Paul continued, 'cannot but be extremely interesting to me, especially because I myself have never been able to understand it. And in future,' he said, glancing at Hetty, who had suddenly recovered and drooped no longer,

but sat up with colour in her cheeks and light in her eyes, 'in future, I shall wonder all my life, more and more, how it was done. I thank you very much for finding out the mystery.'

'You are very welcome,' said Tom. 'I will proceed then, in your presence.'

'In your presence,' echoed Sibyl the Implacable.

'As the evening draws on, and there is something which must be done before we separate,' said Paul, 'may I ask for the postponement—only the postponement—for one hour—of these revelations?'

'Certainly; an hour will make no difference.'

Tom even felt relief at the postponement. It is a truly horrid thing to have to tell a man, to his face, that he is an impostor. Especially is it horrid when that man is believed in by the rest of the household as a Prophet.

'I have a Message.' Paul looked round the circle, addressing all, but resting his eyes on Mr. Brudenel.

‘Oh!’

This interjection has as many meanings as a word in an Arabic Dictionary. Everybody said ‘Oh!’ and everybody in the room meant a different thing.

‘My Message will not take long. Yet it is important. First of all, Miss Brudenel, there is a letter for you. Not a letter from Abyssinia or Thibet, not a communication from the other world.’ Paul smiled. ‘You will not suffer those of the other world to communicate with you. It is a letter written by a human hand, and it concerns you. This is the letter.’

There were no bells, there was no heavenly music, there was no stretching forth of the hand suddenly to catch the letter falling from the ceiling. Paul simply drew from his breast pocket a letter, which he handed to Sibyl.

And now everybody sat up, roused and alert. Lady Augusta caught her husband’s hand and held it. The action cried aloud as plainly as words can speak, ‘Heart up; oh, thou of little faith!’

‘Hetty,’ whispered Cicely, ‘tell me everything he does; make me see him.’

‘The letter is not for me,’ said Sibyl, coldly. ‘It is for Tom. But—oh!—It is in your handwriting, papa.’

‘Mine? Yes, yes; I remember.’

‘Will you yourself give it to Tom?’ said Paul.

Sibyl obeyed, wondering and blushing. What should her father write to Tom that concerned herself?

Tom tore the letter open. Then his cheeks blazed a rosy red, signifying astonishment first and joy next, and astonishment last.

‘Sibyl!’ he cried. ‘Did you know of the letter? Read it—read it. Oh, sir,’ he turned to Mr. Brudenel, ‘how can we thank you? Lady Augusta, is it to you that we owe this letter?’

‘To me? Tom, I do not know the contents of the letter.’

‘Mr. Brudenel gives his consent—a thing which we did not dare ask of him—to our

engagement.' Here he very properly took Sibyl's hand and kissed her on the forehead.

'Your engagement, Sibyl?' cried Lady Augusta. 'Why, I thought—we all thought—that the celibate life—and with Tom? This amazes me!'

'I have consented, dear,' her husband exclaimed. 'It was shown to me that Sibyl was more fitted for the domestic than for the meditative life. I have consented, since they both desire it. But, Tom, if you are a couple of paupers—if the principles of the Higher Philosophy are to be carried out——'

'Oh, Papa.' Sibyl threw herself upon his neck. 'How shall we be paupers when we have love? And Tom will work and become a great man. And—and—oh!'—she was seized with a sudden suspicion—'tell me. You did not write that letter without knowing it, did you?'

'No, child, no. I remember perfectly why I wrote that letter and when. I wrote it in full knowledge. It was explained to me that everything was changed. The whole of

my previous knowledge—so called—was vanity, my idea of approaching and commanding the spirits by the help of a Vestal, as was practised by the ancients, had to be abandoned so far as you are concerned, my dear. I was made to understand that you had already formed an earthly attachment which would be an effectual bar. I consented, my dear, to your taking a place upon the Lower Planes.'

'Yes,' said Sibyl meekly, 'we shall be much happier on the Lower Planes.'

Again Paul, who had retired 'up the stage,' stepped forward.

'You are afraid, Mr. Brudenel, that you will be stripped of your possessions. That is not so. Our Friends are not cruel. If you had been young, like myself, you might have had to give up all. Fear nothing. You will not be called upon to embrace poverty. It is quite true that, under all circumstances, the pursuit of riches is contemptible and detestable: it corrupts the soul and destroys the development of spiritual insight; if you had

been engaged in the pursuit of wealth you would have had to cease. But you have never sought for money ; it has been conferred upon you ; your possession of wealth has enabled you to devote your time to Research. A man like you must not become poor.'

'He must not, Paul. He must not.'

'Your apprehensions were natural. Henceforth have no fear.'

He paused and sighed.

'I am loth to part with my Message,' he said, 'because to part with it is to surrender my past life. That you do not understand. However,' he sighed again, 'I have to acquit myself of my charge. Miss Brudenel, here is another packet for you ; it contains your fortune. And for you, Cicely, is another, containing yours. And for you, Tom, an envelope containing yours. Do not invest your money in commercial companies, and do not seek to make more money. You do not believe in my Friends, Tom ; yet they send you good counsel. Cease merely to question Science. Persecute her continually,

and never, never try to make your knowledge the means of making money.'

Tom tore open his envelope. There was in it a cheque for fifteen thousand pounds signed by Izák Ibn Menelek, payable to order, crossed and protected by the magic words 'Not Negotiable.' Clearly, the Sage of Abyssinia understood the forms and customs practised in London banks.

'Lady Augusta,' said Paul. 'My Friends, you see, have not deserted you.'

'Oh ! I said, all along,' murmured Cicely, 'that we needed nothing but Faith. I knew that we should not be deserted.'

'Was it probable,' Paul asked, 'that those who were wise enough to foretell the fall of the Company, and thoughtful enough not only to cause the shares to be sold out, but the proceeds to be lodged in a place of safety so that they would not be invested in any other dangerous concerns—I say, was it probable that these people should not restore this money on the day that it should fall due to the rightful owners ?'

At this point Mr. Brudenel arose and took Paul's hand and held it while he pronounced over his head, being several inches taller, an encomium upon the Ancient Wisdom. You have seen how, on a previous occasion, he congratulated all the beholders of a certain Miracle upon standing on the Solid Rock. This little occasion was to himself and to his household of much greater importance. He rose to the calls of the situation. In a short, but most eloquent oration, he thanked Paul solemnly for the blessings he had brought to that household, for his own deliverance from superstition, for the Solid Rock of certainty which he had substituted for doubt; for the preservation of his wards' and his daughter's fortunes in the wreck of the bankrupt Company, and, lastly, for the assurance that he himself would not be required to carry out to their logical end the principles of the Ancient Way, as regards the foolishness of riches.

Tom was behind, holding Sibyl by the hand. The pair stood with downcast eyes

and glowing cheeks. Coals of fire heaped upon their heads caused the cheeks of these lovers to glow. The enemy had done this, the enemy; the man whom one of the two had persistently snubbed, insulted wrongly, and unjustly suspected. He had saved her fortune and Tom's fortune; he had caused her father to write with his own hand a letter of consent to their engagement before it had been demanded. Once she raised her eyes and looked inquiringly at Tom. He understood her and whispered—it was when Mr. Brudenel was grappling with the most difficult and the most grateful periods——

‘Dodo,’ he replied. ‘Never. Not even if I find him making your father go on all fours.’ We may guess what he meant, but there can be no certainty. Perhaps he explained to her in these words his intention not to expose certain little facts connected with Paul which might lend themselves to unfavourable conclusions, and turn that Solid Rock once more—oh! how often had that change happened!—into yielding quicksands.

‘Paul,’ said Lady Augusta, when her husband had finished; ‘my dear Paul, how can we thank you—how can we reward you?’

‘I want no thanks,’ he replied somewhat sadly. What was the matter with him? He ought to have replied proudly: ‘I want no reward, Lady Augusta; I have done what I came to do. I must go away now.’ He caught Hetty’s eye. ‘I must soon go away. My work here is done. I will go, while I leave a kindly memory behind me.’

‘But my teaching—Izák’s teaching,’ said Mr. Brudenel. ‘I cannot read him except through you; and you know—Paul—as yet——’

‘I know. Izák Ibn Menelek must work in his own way. My—my hope, Mr. Brudenel, is that your recollections of his teaching will come upon you with a rush. After that your progress will be easy and rapid.’

‘You cannot go, Paul. You must not go,’ said Lady Augusta. ‘We have much—very much—to learn before you go. Stay with us.’

‘I cannot teach you any more,’ said Paul.
‘I must not stay.’

‘Stay with us,’ said Cicely.

‘Stay with us, Paul,’ said Sibyl, with a blush. It was the first time that she had called him by that name. ‘Stay with us.’ She gave him her hand with the gracious smile which a beautiful woman keeps for such occasions. There was repentance in it, and gratitude. ‘Stay with us, Paul.’

The young man sighed heavily. He drew his hand across his forehead and looked about as if in search for something.

‘I will stay a little,’ he said, looking at Hetty. ‘But my work here is finished. I will stay until—until I find out what is to be done next. My friends—Lady Augusta—you have been very kind to me. I never knew before how kind people can be. You received me—a stranger. Well,’ he laughed, ‘I have been of some little use to you. Emanuel Chick and his Spirits are packed off. The old rubbish is carted away.’

‘You have done much more, much more

for us, my dear friend,' said Mr. Brudenel. 'You have demonstrated the solidity of our Faith; you have annihilated time and space; you have introduced us to the wisdom of the great, the incomparable Izák Ibn Menelek. You have placed us firmly on the Solid Rock.'

'Yes,' Paul replied, in the dry tone which is affected by the incredulous. Did he mean to bring doubt and suspicion upon his own teaching?

Well, the play was played; as there was no curtain to drop it remained for the players to get off the stage—always a difficult thing and one which requires the utmost skill of the dramatist to accomplish successfully. They lingered. Flatness seemed impending—merely to say good-night, after getting back all that money, after the solemn assurance that Mr. Brudenel was not to become a wandering Dervish in a ragged black frock coat, after his fervid and eloquent oration—I am really sorry that there is no room for that discourse—after the appeal that Paul should

stay with them, would be a plunge, head over heels, into bathos. All felt this. Flatness is the bane of the domestic drama. There is no curtain. There is no getting off the stage with a flourish. There are no lines with which to conclude. In the real domestic drama there is no conclusion. The finest situation ends with flatness, and after the most moving act the parlour-maid lays the cloth for dinner. All felt this—what could have been done or said? I know not. But at this moment there were heard voices in the Hall. Voices; and in this House where silence was as unbroken as the Law of the Medes and Persians.

‘I forgot,’ said Paul. ‘There was one thing that I had to do. Cicely, I have brought your brother back to you.’

‘My brother? My brother Percival? Oh!’

‘He is outside now. I will call him.’ Paul opened the door. Sir Percival came in and stood before them.

You have seen him already in the common

sailor dress. The man with the weather-beaten cheeks and hands bronzed with sun and wind. The man with the strange and gleaming eyes. The man with the quick gestures and the fiery tongue.

‘Percival!’ Cicely sprang to her feet, holding out her arms. ‘Percival! where are you?’

Her brother suffered her to fall upon his neck. He allowed her to kiss him. He endured her fond words and her endearments. But he made no response except that he kissed her once upon the forehead.

‘Percival,’ said Mr. Brudenel, ‘you are welcome home. I hope you have returned home to resume your proper place.’

‘I am about the Master’s work,’ replied the enthusiast. ‘This house is a house of the Devil. Here you inquire of the Oracle and seek learning of the witches. I have nothing to do with any of this house. Leave me with my sister.’

‘Shake hands, Percy,’ said Tom.

‘I shake hands with no one in this house.

Leave me, while I inquire concerning the safety of my sister's soul.'

'Do not frighten her, Percival,' said Lady Augusta. 'I will give you ten minutes with her—no more.'

They left him alone with Cicely.

When ten minutes later Lady Augusta went back into the room, she found Sir Percival on his knees, pouring forth a wild prayer for his sister; while Cicely sat trembling and terrified, her head in her hands.

Paul walked home with Hetty. She laid her hand upon his arm, and they went through the quiet streets together.

'My heart is full of you, Hetty,' said the young man. 'I am possessed with you. I understand, now, what was meant when I was warned not to fall in love. My dear, you have ruined me; but I love you all the more.'

'No, Paul, I have not ruined you. I, who would die for you? I have made you lose that Power. I am glad—I am glad.'

'Yes, dear, it is all lost. I can do no more

the things that you have seen me do. I have become like other men—as powerless.’

‘Paul, forgive me.’ She laid the other hand upon his arm. ‘Oh! forgive me. I ought not to be glad. But I am. I do not mind—not a bit—that you have become like other men. Remember what you said to Tom when he thought he had lost his fortune. Work will bring out your genius as well as his. And, besides—oh! Paul, I hate the dreadful life of a medium. I should be in constant terror lest you should trade upon your powers. Now they are gone. I thank God, Paul, with all my heart that they are gone. I pray that they may never come back again.’

‘They never will, Hetty. I am certain they never will.’

‘And my love will be just like other men—as weak, as blind. Just like other men. Oh, my dear, and there will be no other women hanging upon his lips. I shall have him all to myself, and as for the other world, why——’ she sighed with relief, ‘we shall see

the other world with no eyes—oh ! how happy shall I be—except the eyes of Faith ! ’

They were at the door.

Within, in the front parlour, sat Lavinia and Mr. James Berry, inquiring and getting a wonderful ‘mix’ in the nature of reply.

Outside, Lavinia’s daughter stood praying Heaven that communications with the other world were closed.

‘Kiss me yourself, Hetty. Good night, my dear. Good night.’

She went indoors. Paul lingered a moment after the door closed, as a lover does because the house which contains his girl is a sanctuary, and the very doorstep is an altar. Then he, too, turned to go, and stood face to face with another girl.

‘Bethiah !’ he cried.

‘Ziph ! Oh ! Ziph !—is it—really—is it—Ziphion Trinder ?’

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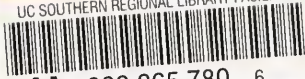
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